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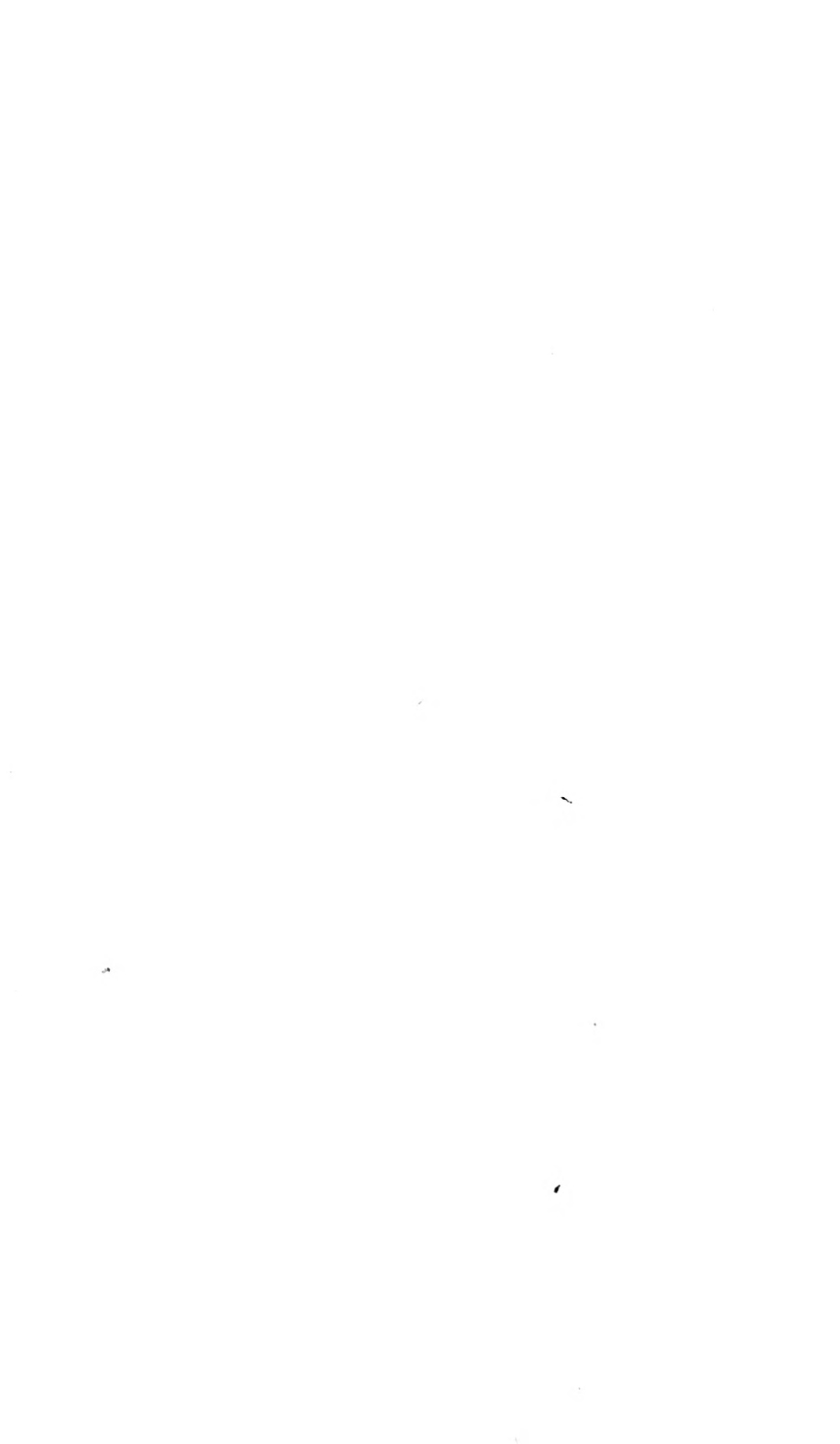
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PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

THE following Answers were, amongst others, delivered in a weekly Lecture,* during the last winter, (1755,) with a view to remove the doubts of the timorous Christian, quicken him in his way to Zion, to guard against presumptuous hopes, and promote the life of religion in the soul. That these important ends might be answered, the auditory were desired to supply us with serious Cases of Conscience, arising from the difficulties they met with in the course of their experience, and to conceal their names, that so they might with the greater freedom propose their respective Cases, and that we, in our solution of them, might be kept from the least degree of fear or restraint.

Through the repeated importunities of our friends,

* Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate Street.



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CASES OF CONSCIENCE.

CASE I.

How shall we distinguish between the workings of natural affection, and the real exercise of Grace, in religious duties?

THIS serious question lately came into my hands in these very words; and, upon reading it, I could not but see that it contained a query of the greatest importance, and therefore thought it might be very proper to take it into consideration, and give it as clear a solution as lays in my power.

I confess it to be a very close and interesting inquiry, such as requires some skill to answer it, but much more spiritual skill to apply it to our own hearts and cases. You will easily see both the importance and difficulty of the question, by a free and familiar stating it, after this manner.

There are many that go to, or come from gospel-ordinances, entirely stupid, careless, and unaffected, having no real regard for the power or spirit of religion, and aiming at no more than the *form* of it. To such as these the present query is an indifferent matter; and their very indifference is an evident proof, that the state of their persons, or the frame of their hearts, is really sad and deplorable, though they know it not, or, are utterly unconcerned about it.

There are others, who, when they attend upon, or engage in religious duties, such as reading, hearing, singing, and praying, have their affections strongly moving; so that these persons can, and do frequently weep under ordinances for grief or joy; they often attend the means of grace with much pleasure in

their countenances, and many tears in their eyes. These appearances, I profess, are very pleasing and promising in an assembly, and sometimes indicate that the Spirit of God is at work in their hearts: and many Christians are ready to take it for granted, that those ordinances are truly beneficial, where the passions are thus agitated, and to esteem those lost opportunities, where this is not the case.

But here I must observe, that we have great reason to be suspicious of ourselves, and should not make this the rule to judge of the usefulness of an ordinance by; but make a further inquiry, whether these motions within us, or these impressions upon us, are the workings of natural affection only, as they certainly may be, or the real exercise of spiritual grace.

And this is the very question under consideration. Many, I fear, are *awfully deceived* with the mere workings of nature, by thinking them sufficient evidences of the presence and blessing of God in his own institutions; while, on the other hand, many are *groundlessly discouraged*, because they do not feel such strong emotions as others do; thinking that this is an evident token of the barrenness and uselessness of ordinances.

That we may not be either deceived, or unreasonably discouraged, by these means, let me therefore now attempt a serious and plain solution of this query, looking up to the Divine Spirit to make the whole clear to your understandings, and to apply it close to your consciences.

I would offer the following considerations as preparatory to a direct answer, and then proceed to the solution itself:

Observe I. *The affections of the mind may be excited in a merely natural way under divine ordinances.*—The proof of this point will be best introduced by endeavouring to set before you some of those ways, in which mere nature may be impressed or raised under the means of grace.—1. The affections of the mind may be excited by a *natural impression*. Thus, when a person is attending upon the ministrations of the word, he may find himself moved only by the beauty of the style, or the propriety of the language, or by the loudness or tuneableness of the preacher's voice, or the apparent fervency of his address. Such circumstances as these may move the affections in a way purely mechanical, without being attended with any spiritual or saving effects; for hereby only animal nature is touched, or the speculative powers employed, in a pleasing or disagreeable way. This seems to have been the case with the hearers of the great prophet Ezekiel, as mentioned Ez. xxxiii. 32. *Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a*

pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not. Let not any therefore conclude, that ordinances are profitable to them, merely because they are pleasing and delightful to their ears; for the manner of the preacher's address may make a natural impression upon his hearers, without having any spiritual or useful effect.—2. The affections may be sometimes raised by a *natural sympathy*; which sympathy regards not merely the *manner* of the preacher, but the *matter* also, which he delivers. If the preacher himself appears very earnest in his address, and very much affected with what he delivers, this does often effectually work upon the natural affections of his hearers by way of sympathy. If he appears concerned, they feel a sympathetic concern along with him: If he seems raised and delighted, they by sympathy partake of his pleasure to such a degree, as actually to weep and rejoice with him. Again, if the minister be setting forth something, that is in its own nature very affecting, in expressive language, here the power of oratory produces in the minds of the hearers a sympathy with that which he is relating or describing. Thus, if the minister be setting forth, in very mournful strains, the sufferings and agonies of Christ, his relation of these tragical occurrences may move the affections of the people merely in a sympathetic way, without making any saving or spiritual impression on their hearts; and there may be no more in these workings of affection, than what most persons, I believe, are obliged to feel, when attentively reading that memorable history of Joseph and his brethren, whereby the affections of joy and sorrow, resentment and pleasure, are alternately excited in a way purely natural.—3. The affections are sometimes raised under ordinances from a purely *natural* or *notional inclination*. A person may meet with that in a sermon, which suits his taste, or falls in with its previous sentiments: and, as it is natural for us to be pleased with, and to be fond of, our own opinions; therefore whenever we meet with what corresponds thereto, we are necessarily pleased and delighted. If what is advanced in a sermon strongly confirms or beautifully illustrates what we believe, this will certainly draw forth the pleasure and agreeable affections of the mind. But let us not conclude from thence, that we have received any spiritual advantage, or that there has been any thing more than the natural effect of a natural cause; for in all this satisfaction there may be nothing spiritual or evangelical, even though what we are pleased with, be gospel truth. On the other hand, we may meet with something in a sermon that may disgust or

displease us; and this may excite answerable affections; and these affections we may be ready to esteem a true zeal for the truth, in opposition to error: yet, after all these emotions of the mind, there may be nothing spiritual or savoury brought home to our hearts, not any working of true grace in the soul. Once more:—4. The affections being raised more or less, may very much depend upon our *natural constitutions*. For we know that some are of a more soft, tender, and affectionate disposition than others; and these are more easily touched and moved by what occurs in an ordinance, than others, and are more frequently melted into tears. This therefore must not always be ascribed to a greater degree of the Spirit's operations, since it may be frequently accounted for from a cause that is merely natural. Thus we see how natural *impressions*, natural *sympathy*, natural *inclination*, and natural *constitution*, may be the sole cause or occasion of raising the affections under an ordinance. But to prevent any discouraging mistake, let me proceed to observe,

II. *That the affections being thus moved in a natural way, is an experience that is no way evil in itself.*—There is no sin in this natural inclination, impression, sympathy, or constitution; it is but right for us to be thus moved, unless these impressions lead us off from the gospel, or, unless they are mistaken for the operations of saving grace. If indeed we fall into this mistake, it may be of very dangerous consequence, and an awful means of making us misjudge our frames and experiences; being deluded by natural, instead of spiritual impressions.

This discourse is not designed to engage you to restrain or suppress such natural workings of the affections, since they are what the God of nature has formed in us; but only to teach us how to distinguish them from what is truly spiritual and saving, that we might not mistake nature for grace. For which reason, I would further observe,

III. *That the workings of natural affection may be a means, in the hands of the divine Spirit, to excite and promote the exercise of spiritual grace.*—God may bless a natural constitution or sympathy, and make them a means of spiritual good. Many a person, by the means of his natural affections, has been brought and kept under the ministration of the gospel with delight; and this has been the first occasion of his being begotten through the gospel. Many have been so captivated by the fervency or oratory of a gospel-minister, as to introduce them into privileges, which have been blest to everlasting advantage. Remember the case of Ruth the Moabitess, how

the strong affection that she, though bred up in idolatry, had for her mother-in-law Naomi, induced her to come into the land of Israel with her mother; and in this sweet, gradual, and insensible way, she was prevailed upon to forsake her false gods, and to put her trust in the shadow of the wings of the God of Israel. How beautifully did natural and spiritual affection unite in those words, Ruth i. 16. *Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!* And as many are caught to their ruin, by those things which lay hold of their natural affections at first; so, blessed be God, some are brought to Christ in the very same way. Once more, it is needful to take notice,

IV. *That the exercise of saving grace in ordinances does frequently stir up our natural affections into sensible exercise.* Grace working strongly in the heart, has an effect even upon the animal frame: the emotions of the soul, by the influences of the divine Spirit, will occasion and produce a great change in the posture of the animal spirits. So that the case is mutual: natural affection may be so blest, as to be an occasion of our receiving spiritual grace and comfort; while on the contrary, the exercise of saving grace, may be the occasion of many impressions upon our animal frames.

But though these things are thus frequently linked together, and co-operate with one another, yet still there is a most important distinction between them. This therefore brings me to collect the whole together, in order to give a direct solution to the question proposed.

What has been said, will a little alter the *form* of the query. For, since natural and spiritual affection are so connected together, the question is not, whether our natural affections are moved, or only spiritual affections excited, in ordinances; but, how shall we know whether there be any thing more than what is purely natural in the motions of our affections, under divine ordinances? There may be, and generally is, a great deal of what is natural along with that which is spiritual and saving; and there may be nothing of what is spiritual, and saving, where there is much of that which is natural. In order to distinguish things that differ in this case, let us put the following queries seriously to ourselves:

1. *Whether that which moves our affections under an ordinance, be what is truly spiritual and evangelical?* Sometimes we are affected by the oratory of the language, the tuneableness of the voice, or the suitableness of the phraseology; and, if this be all, here is certainly nothing but nature. Sometimes we

are affected by the matter delivered, as well as by the manner of the delivery; but perhaps that which touches and moves us is the mere superficial or historical part of the discourse, without being at all moved by the interesting, important, spiritual part of it: in this case, here is nothing but natural sympathy; as the daughters of Jerusalem (Luke xxiii. 27, 28.) beheld the sufferings of Christ with tears of compassion, without seeing or being impressed by the spiritual end of his sufferings, or attending to the awful consequences of them upon the city and its inhabitants. But, if our affections are wrought upon in a spiritual manner, it is by our regard to the evangelical parts of the discourse. For, so far as true grace works, that which chiefly affects the mind, are those things which respect the method of grace, the salvation of the soul, the suitableness and excellency of Christ, and the like; and if we are made to feel the power of these things upon our minds, so as to be impressed by the thought of the sinfulness of sin, the fulness of the covenant, the riches of grace, and the way of the spirit in convincing, converting, sanctifying, and comforting the soul, here is now something more than nature, because nature will never teach us to regard such spiritual things in a spiritual way.

2. *We should inquire, not only whether our affections are moved, but likewise whether our very hearts and consciences are touched.* There is a vast difference between the *affections* and the *conscience* in subjects of this nature; and it is of the highest importance for us to discern this difference, because, unless the conscience be impressed, all other motions and impressions are of no saving avail. Let us therefore ask ourselves, whether we do see or feel *our own* concern in the word delivered, and whether the thought of its respecting *our own* state, frame, or duty, be that which makes the word pleasant or powerful to us? To familiarize this matter to us, let us be concerned to put it home to our souls in particular cases. When we are hearing or thinking upon the doctrine of the depravity of nature, does this affect us in a humbling way, because we see and feel it to be *our own* case? When we are attending to the doctrine of Christ, in his redemption, atonement, and righteousness, what is it now that affects our minds? Is it merely because we like the doctrine, and are pleased with the manner of handling it? or is it because these important truths are applied to our consciences as the only ground of our hope, and the proper matter of consolation for our souls, under a real sense of the sinfulness and guilt of *our own* sins? When

the nature and necessity of the Spirit's gracious and powerful influences are displayed so as to affect us, is it only because we like the subject, the preacher, or his manner? or is it because we have in *our own* souls at that time a sight and feeling of our need of them, and because we hope and desire to be made partakers of them? Once more: when we hear a searching discourse, a discourse that plainly sets forth the marks and signs of a safe or dangerous state, of a good or bad frame; now let us observe, if this touches our affections, and if it does, whether the reason is, because we are led hereby to a serious examination of *our own* hearts, state, and frame, and have our hopes or our fears excited upon this principle? Thus, in all cases, inquire whether that which affects us in reading or hearing the word, be the sight we have of *our own* concern with, or interest in, the things declared: If so, this is an effect that is more than natural, because nature of itself will never thus apply the word to *our own* hearts and consciences.

And we may be sure, that a very great point is gained by the word and ordinances of the gospel, if they come in this manner close to *our own* state or frame. Whereas it is to be feared, that many are pleased with, and in some way impressed by, the word, who are never thus touched to the quick by it.

3. *Let us inquire, whether our hearts are so impressed as to stir up the graces of the Spirit into exercise in our souls.* This can never be done, without such an application of the word to the conscience, as has been just described; and where there is this self-application, it seldom fails of quickening and exciting these graces. But forasmuch as it is possible for the word to be misapplied, so as to promote a false hope, or beget an awful despair, it is therefore needful to add this question to the former: Do the declarations of the word humble us under a sense of our own meanness, unworthiness, guilt, and pollution? Are we by the word emptied of self, made to abhor ourselves, because of our defilement and abominations? Are our desires raised after Christ, his sanctifying grace, and his justifying righteousness? Are we hereby stirred up to flee to Christ, to depend upon him, to seek after a conformity to him, and to love him as one altogether lovely? In a word, are we, by the means of grace, drawn off from self, sense, and sin, unto Christ Jesus for righteousness and strength? If there be such motions as these produced or excited in our hearts, in reading, hearing, or prayer, it is evident, that the graces of the Spirit are exercised. And although under an ordinance, where

experiences are felt, there may be much of natural sympathy or impression; yet we have no reason to question the operations of grace, because of the workings of nature; but rather should bless God, that he is pleased to turn the natural affections into a spiritual channel, or to make them a means of promoting what is truly spiritual and evangelical. But in order to prevent all mistakes upon this head, that we might not be deceived with counterfeit, for real graces, it will be needful to make one more inquiry:

4. *Whether these motions of affection have any holy tendency, and produce a holy effect upon our hearts and lives?* These workings of soul under ordinances, let them be ever so strong, ever so pleasant, or in appearance ever so evangelical, are certainly delusive, if they have not the stamp of holiness upon them. If these pleasing impressions tend to make us less watchful against sin, or less careful to perform our duty; if they fill us with a pleasing imagination, that we need not be so much afraid of sinning, or need not be so diligent in duty, because all is safe; this turn of thought, included in these motions of affection, is an infallible mark, that the experience is delusive, detrimental, and diabolical. But, if these workings of soul tend to increase our hatred of sin, and our watchfulness against it, and to promote our love to Christ and true holiness; if they leave such a savour behind them upon our spirits, as imbitters sin, and gives us a relish for, and delight in, the ways of the Lord; if they promote our reverence for God's name, and our love to his people, his ordinances, and his precepts; we may then be certain that they are of a spiritual and saving nature.

Let us now collect the whole together, and apply it by a few remarks, for instruction and examination.

1. Hence learn, that *there is no grace of the Spirit, but has its counterfeit.* Nature can mimic a true faith, by a notional belief; can mimic a true hope, by presuming upon the enjoyment of gospel-privileges: can mimic a true love, by a love to the means of grace upon natural principles; can mimic a true godly sorrow, by a sympathetic weeping under an affecting discourse; can mimic a true joy in the Lord, by a delight in gospel-ordinances, upon self-righteous and carnal principles.

2. Hence learn, that *to judge of the degree of our profiting under an ordinance by the degree of affection, is a deceitful way of judging.* We may be most profited, when least affected, and least profited, when most affected. For it is not the degree,

but the nature and kind of the impression, that we are to attend to, when examining whether the word is profitable to us or no. This thought, if properly regarded, will afford matter for the conviction of some, and for the consolation of others. Art thou often delighted with, and melted into tears under an ordinance? Do not immediately conclude, that thou art a thriving Christian; for most, if not the whole of this experience may arise only from a natural softness of temper, or from the natural impressions made upon thee by the liveliness of the preacher, or the beauty of his style. On the contrary, art thou seldom affected in a lively manner, or to any sensible degree, under an ordinance? Do not therefore at once discourage thyself; for, notwithstanding this defect, thou mayest have a solid love to Christ, hatred of sin, and desire after holiness, promoted and confirmed: and, if this be thy case, thou art no *forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word*, although thou mayest not be so affected as some others are.

3. Hence learn *how to put proper questions to yourselves, to know whether you are truly advantaged by any divine ordinances*. When you reflect upon any means of grace you have enjoyed, or upon any spiritual duties you have performed, converse with your souls in some such manner as this: “O my soul, thou hast been now engaged in a precious duty, enjoying a spiritual privilege, but how has it been with me under it? Have I been totally stupid, or have I not been, in some measure, affected, impressed, or delighted? If I have been absolutely unaffected in hearing, or prayer, &c. sure I have great reason to be humbled and ashamed, that my heart has been so hard, and the powers of my soul so sadly wandering, or so inactive and unemployed, when things of infinite importance have been transacting. But if I have been melted, pleased, or impressed, have I not still some reason to be jealous over myself, lest what has passed in my soul should be what is merely natural, instead of being truly spiritual? Let me then come to a close and serious examination. What was that which made me weep or rejoice, that pleased me or impressed me? Did those glorious truths that were delivered in preaching, or those important concerns I transacted with God in prayer, affect my mind? Was I enabled, under the ordinance, to apply these things to *my own* case? Was I affected with my own interest in them, or my own concern with them? And did these impressions stir me up, to go out of myself, and cast my soul upon Christ for righteousness? Were my affections of hope or fear, of joy or sorrow, so excited, as to draw me off

from self and sin, to Christ and his grace? And had these experiences any thing of a *holy* stamp upon them, and have they left a savour behind them to make me more desirous after Christ and holiness, and to be delivered from the power, pollution, and practice of sin? If this be my case, I have great cause to bless God for the presence of his grace, and the influences of his Spirit; and so far as I find my experience defective in these particulars, so far I am called upon to humble myself before God for the barrenness and unfruitfulness of my heart in these spiritual duties."

Thus upon the whole, we may see how to distinguish between the workings of natural affection, and the exercise of spiritual grace. But let me entreat you to be earnest for the teachings of the Holy Spirit, which are absolutely necessary to apply what has been stated to your own *hearts*, and to enable you to pass a right judgment for yourselves in a case so spiritual and so important.

CASE II.

What methods must a Christian, in declining circumstances, take to recover a healthful and vigorous frame of soul, so as to be able to maintain real and close communion with God amidst the hurries and businesses of this world?

[This Question is formed from the following Letter:]

"I HAVE, through a great multiplicity of worldly affairs, and a deep engagement in them, lost that savour and relish for divine things I once experienced, and am become a sad stranger to that real communion with God, which was heretofore my chief joy; and I am so greatly declined in the Christian life, that I can sometimes omit the duties of secret prayer and meditation, and at other times I perform them with formality and coldness, and yet am no ways suitably affected with my sad defections. Indeed, sometimes I have been helped to bemoan my sad case before God, and to plead with the blessed Jesus, the great and good Physician, to heal and help me.

But alas, things remain with me as before! and if there be any alteration in my case, I really think it is for the worse!"

THIS is a question, which, I doubt not, is suitable to the cases of many of God's people in the present dark and degenerate day, when there are so many temptations and difficulties to cool their zeal, damp their joy, and fill them with formality and indifferency of spirit in the service of the Redeemer. It is not with us, as it was with our forefathers. We have not their zeal, their faith, their love. We are not humble as they were, nor so watchful as they against the temptations and sins to which we are exposed. We discover not that acquaintance with the power of religion which they had. We walk not so close with God as they. In fine, we have the name, the form, but we have not so much of the life, the spirit, the power of godliness, as our forefathers had, who are now in glory. We are more worldly, more selfish, more proud and haughty, more careless and negligent of our frames and our conversation, and have, in all respects, more of the appearance of *almost-christians* than they; yet, blessed be God, this is not the case with every individual. There are a few who desire to honour God, by a lively faith, a becoming zeal, and a close and humble walk; a few, whose concern it is to make the greatest advances in grace, and to maintain daily communion with God, amidst the various hurries of life. They cannot live long without God. They are never easy but when they are feeling his animating and quickening presence with them; and their souls, in consequence of it, warmed, enlivened, and breathing out desires after him. This seems to be the case with the person who sent in the above question. You know something of the excellency of communion with God, my dear friend; you have found what it is, to have a sweet relish for divine things; and now you are full of uneasiness at the sad loss you have sustained through the hurries and enjoyments of this life, and desirous of having your former experience revived, and to find your soul again in a lively, healthful, and vigorous condition. Herein you are not singular. Many, I am persuaded, speak the same language you do, feel the same things, have the same desires, and are equally at a loss what to do. It is a case of some importance. May the Spirit of God enable me to answer it in such a manner as may, through a divine blessing, be effectual to bring your soul and the soul of others nearer to God, and quicken you to the pursuit of that which has a tendency to promote your growth in grace, and make you flourishing and

lively Christians!—But, before I directly answer your question, I would make two or three observations upon it, that may give encouragement to persons in such circumstances, as well as be a caution to them in their pursuits of this world.—And,

1. *It is a peculiar mercy, when we find our souls in a declining condition, to be immediately alarmed at it, and sensible of it.* When God is about to bestow the blessings of salvation, he first makes the sinner sensible of his need of them; so when he is about to revive his work in the soul that has been running astray from him, he gives him first, a sense of his decline, shows him from whence he has fallen, what a stranger he is to the life of religion, what ingratitude he has been guilty of, how much he has lost of the pleasures of the divine life, and how much he has dishonoured that God who called him out of darkness into his marvellous light. To lie asleep, as David did after his adultery and murder, is awful. Oh! Sin is of a hardening nature. The Christian is often stupified and benumbed with it. It shuts his eyes, and it hardens his heart. He has lost, in some measure, his zeal and liveliness. His graces are withering. His duties are cold and formal; nay, he can oftentimes omit them. He has not that communion with God he once enjoyed; and yet he appears to be contented. Melancholy case! Bless God that this is not your case. You appear to be sensible of the unhealthy condition your soul is in. You see it is not with you as in months past. Bless God, Christians, if you are sensible of any decays, if your eyes are open, and your souls are impressed with a deep sense of the loss of communion with God, the neglect of duty, or formality in it.

2. *We should esteem it a mercy, if, when under a decline, we are earnestly desirous of a revival.* This appears to be the case with you, my friend. Methinks, I see you viewing former seasons of communion, falling down before God, and under a deep sense of your declining circumstances, hear you humbly addressing Him in the following manner:—"Lord, show me what thou wouldst have me to do. I would acknowledge my many omissions of duty, my great carelessness and negligence, and would be deeply sensible of the loss I have sustained. O revive thy work in my soul, and let me not lie at this languishing rate! Lord, quicken, quicken this slothful heart, enkindle the sacred spark afresh, and let me be all alive for Thee!" How happy is it, when we are enabled to speak such language, and find our souls in such a frame as this! But, on the other hand, to be careless and unconcerned, to be easy and

contented, in such circumstances, is an awful sign, that religion is languishing in our souls, and that there is no present appearance of an alteration. David, when awake, was not only sensible of the dangerous condition he had been in, but was desirous of a revival of the work of God in his soul, that he might again enjoy communion with him, and flourish and prosper in the divine life. Therefore he earnestly prayed, that God would graciously look upon him, and return to him, Ps. li. 7.

3. *It is a difficult thing to have much to do with the world, and to grow in grace.* Through the degeneracy of our hearts, the world is become an enemy to our souls, a hinderance in our way to heaven. Many, like the young man, keep their enjoyments, to the loss of their souls. The Christian himself, who has found the emptiness of the world, and its insufficiency to satisfy an immortal desire, is notwithstanding ready to be too fond of it, and finds it a sad clog and hinderance to him at times. He would often leave it behind him, when he goes to worship God, but it will follow him from duty to duty, interrupt his communion with God, lead his heart aside, and damp the exercise of every grace. How ready is the Christian to swell with pride on account of his flourishing enjoyments! We have need of great grace to keep us humble, in prosperous circumstances, either of soul or body.—Is the Christian immersed in cares? Here he is in danger of being filled with too much anxiety, and of employing too much of his time in the world, to the neglect of some important duties of religion; in the suitable discharge of which, the divine life is kept up in the soul. Thus *it is difficult for those, who have much to do with the world, to grow in grace.* I mention this, to quicken the Christian diligently to attend to those means that are necessary for his keeping up a lively sense of the things of God in his soul; and to keep him from being discouraged, if at any time he sees he has lost his frame, through his many anxious cares, or through the temptations arising from *this world*. I doubt not but this is the case with many. Many of you, my dear friends, have known what it is, to lose communion with God through the hurries of life; what to have your souls out of tune; what to be tempted to the omission of duties. I would bring in myself with you, and lay my hand upon my mouth, crying out, *Guilty, guilty!* What then shall we do in such unpleasing circumstances? This leads me directly to answer the case, viz. *What methods we must take to recover a healthful and vigorous frame of soul, so as to be able to maintain*

real and close communion with God amidst the hurries of life?

—It requires a person of great experience to give a suitable answer to so important a question. Sensible of my own weakness here, I hope I have earnestly entreated the assistance of the Spirit of God; in consequence of which my mind, I trust, has been directed to the following things, which I would now humbly suggest to you, as necessary in this case:—

I. *Examine carefully into the occasion of your decline.* That God brings some afflictions upon his people in a way of sovereignty, is plain, if we look into his word: but, when he withholds the special influences of his Spirit from us, the consequences of which are, loss of communion with Him, the withering of our graces, and a decline with regard to the life of religion in our souls, we may immediately conclude, that we have dishonoured God in some instance or other, and provoked him thus partly to leave us. It is necessary then to inquire into the occasions of God's withdrawal, not only for our present, but for our future guidance. Was Job anxious to know why God contended with him in a way of affliction, and shall we not be solicitous to examine into the reasons of our present decline? To lose spiritual enjoyments, is much more melancholy than to be under temporal afflictions. Come then, my soul; and come, my Christian friends; and particularly come you, my dear friend, who sent in the above case, and are desirous of a revival; come, and let us examine, wherein we have provoked God to withdraw. What has been the reason of our late coldness and formality? How came we to lose any of our zeal for Christ? How is it we have been led to omit spiritual duties of prayer, meditation? &c. Why is it we have not experienced the presence of the spirit in ordinances, drawing our souls after Jesus, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts? Oh! why is it, that it is not with us as in months past, when we sat under the shadow of the Lord, and his presence filled our souls with unspeakable joy? We have reason to be jealous of our wicked hearts, and to fear that they have led us aside, and so we have grieved the Holy Spirit, and he has discovered his displeasure—let us make the inquiry.—

Perhaps we have been too much elated with pride. Pride is a great enemy to the divine life. It has often provoked the Spirit to withdraw his presence, that, being in some measure left to ourselves, we might be humbled, and not think of ourselves beyond what we ought. It was pride that provoked God to leave Peter; and see how shamefully he fell, Luke xxii. 33. 57—60. The Apostle Paul was like to be carried

away with pride, even under those high enjoyments he was favoured with; therefore he had a *messenger of Satan* sent to buffet him. 2 Cor. xii. 1—7. Some are proud of the world. They grow in riches, and their hearts are lifted up, as if they were more amiable, or had more interest in God, than others. Is this your case, my friends; examine. Have not temporal or spiritual enjoyments lifted you up too much? Have not these vain hearts been flattering you, as persons of some peculiar worth? and have you not been ready to swell with the thought, and, from such an apprehension, to look with an unchristian air upon others?

Again, *Perhaps you have been led by your enjoyments to indulge a security and carelessness of spirit.* Through the sad wickedness of our hearts, we have often been guilty here, and so have suffered an unspeakable loss. It has often been suggested to us after spiritual enjoyments, that our state is safe and secure; there is no depriving us of the promised inheritance: God has given us an evident token of his everlasting love to our souls; therefore we need not be so much in duty, but may indulge a *little* liberty, and enjoy a *few* of the pleasures and comforts of the present life; and all this consistent with our hopes of a better. These thoughts, perhaps, we have too eagerly sucked in, from their having a plausible appearance; and they have proved poison to our souls: for, whilst we have been taking this *innocent* liberty, we have insensibly grown *careless* and *secure*, and have lost our spiritual joy. This may be the case also as to temporal enjoyments. Inquire therefore; Have not these led you to a *carelessness and security of spirit*? God has perhaps increased your substance, and given you every thing richly to enjoy. You are like many of the world; you abound with comforts, and you must be like them too, in frame and spirit. Oh, there is great danger here! They apprehend themselves to be too rich, to be religious; that God will pay a deference to them on account of their station. And has not this been a temptation to you at times, and so you have sunk in your zeal, and in close communion and converse with God?

Again, *Perhaps you have loved this world too much. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* 1 John ii. 15. Though you may not love the world in the sense of the apostle; yet your affections may be so much set upon it, as to make a jealous God withdraw the special tokens of his love from you. It is every way unsuitable to our profession of love to God, to be so fond of present things. It is

offering the greatest affront to our adorable Immanuel; as if there were more excellency in the world than in him, or, as if he was not a sufficient portion for us. O Christians, inquire; inquire, my friend, how your heart stands as to the world. Have you been slighting your Lord, your husband, your best of friends, by valuing the world too much?

Again, *Perhaps through a multiplicity of engagements, you have been tempted to neglect those duties, in which Christians meet with God, and by which they find their souls enlivened.* Every duty is beautiful in its season. There is a time to mind the world, and a time to attend to the affairs of the soul. To be diligent in our calling is doubtless a duty. A Christian, who is careless and slothful in his worldly affairs, is no honour to religion. I would not throw one reflection upon industry in the pursuit of our lawful business, but rather applaud it. But then we should remember, that the world has not a right to *all* our time. Martha was encumbered about making provision for our Lord, when she ought to have been at his feet, hearing his doctrine: Luke x. 38—42. So the Christian is often in the world, when he should be in his family, or in his closet. Perhaps your engagements are great; you are obliged to be much in company: this is a temptation to you to neglect some important duties; duties that have been made sweet and pleasant to your souls. You will permit me, my dear friends, to be quite free. The case under consideration gives me an opportunity for it; and the prosperity of our souls is a matter of such importance, that it requires it. I cannot but be inclined to think that evening clubs, so frequent even amongst professors, are injurious to the Christian life. Let me here explain myself, for fear of a mistake. I mean not that we are to avoid all company and conversation in an evening. Christian conversation is necessary, and greatly useful; nay, whilst we are engaged in the affairs of this life, it will be often necessary for a Christian to mix with those that perhaps are not so. But when so much time is spent in evening visits, clubs, &c. as interferes with, and often sets aside the duties of the family and the closet, or leaves but little time for these things, no wonder we then lose ground in the divine life, especially if this is too much our practice. We should remember that real religion lies not in much talking, but in a secret converse with God, and in an experience of his quickening presence and grace. Christian conversation, indeed, has an excellent tendency to promote this: and oh, that it was more found amongst us! But great beauty and a good deal of Christian

skill lies in the timing of these things. One duty should not jostle out, or prevent the discharge of another. Let me appeal to your conscience, O professor, and ask you a few questions. Is it your usual practice to spend your evenings abroad? What is the consequence? Do you find your family in a suitable disposition to attend to social worship at your coming home? Rather, are they not wearied with the hurries of the day, and wishing for rest? The duty is oftentimes in such a circumstance sadly curtailed, if not totally neglected. And how is it with the closet? That has seldom an evening visit. You have no time to look into your soul, to mourn over the sins of the day, or to call over its mercies; no time for reading or meditation. One neglect of this kind makes way for another; and the professor can content himself with it. Oh, Christians, has this been the case with any of you? Has this been the case with you, my friend? Has the multiplicity of your affairs, or have your engagements prevented your often being in your closet? What have you lost? But, alas! you are contented, and think that none can blame you, so long as you have been in company with some of the friends of Jesus. Go on so, and see what will be the consequences. You will gradually lose a relish for the power and pleasures of religion, and your zeal will too much degenerate into controversy. You may talk much of God; but you will walk but little with him. Pardon my freedom, my dear friends; I bring no charge against you, but what I would bring against myself; and would therefore put *myself* upon the inquiry, as well as you.

Thus examine into the occasions of your decline.—I have given you some instances to direct and help your inquiries. But stop not here, but carefully examine every thing by which you may have provoked God to withdraw his special presence from you.

II. *When you have found the occasions of your decline, humble yourselves before the Lord, guard carefully against them for the future, get your hearts sensibly affected with your loss, and earnestly pray, that the Spirit may not depart from you, but graciously return unto you.*—This was the case with David, of whom we have already spoken. When he was brought to a sense of his sins, how humble! he fell down prostrate before God, acknowledged and bewailed his backslidings. He was jealous, lest he should have provoked God entirely to withdraw his presence and Spirit from him; therefore he expostulated with him for the return of his favour, and that he would

restore those divine consolations which he had before experienced, but had lately lost, Ps. li. 11, 12. Though we may not have been provoking God to withhold from us his special presence by the commission of such open and public sins as David, yet we have been too closely attached to the *world*. Have we neglected some of the great and important duties of the Christian life? Have we been too proud, too careless and secure in our frame, our walk, and behaviour? Have we been trifling with God? It certainly becomes us to humble ourselves before him, if we expect his return unto us. We should draw near to him with weeping and lamentation; should be often endeavouring to impress our hearts with a sense of our ingratitude; should be often mourning before the Lord; and should set a mark upon those things that have been the *occasions of our decline*, that we may *watch against them* for the future. Be often reflecting upon the loss you have had. Consider the sickly condition your souls have been in, whilst the spirit was withdrawn from you. Consider how justly God might have left you, had he been strict to mark your backslidings: and oh! admire his infinite patience, and earnestly pray for his Spirit to return and breathe upon your dry bones. Let it be your daily concern to beg of God, that he would keep your hearts, your affections, quicken your souls, and not leave you to coldness and formality. When Israel were exhorted to return unto the Lord, after they had sinned, they are directed to return by prayer, and instructed how to pray, or what to say, Hos. xiv. 2. *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render thee the calves of our lips, &c.* Prayer suits all cases, and is never to be neglected. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.* James v. 13. So, has any fallen, grieved the Spirit, and lost in some measure that liveliness and vigour of soul he once experienced; let him return to God by prayer. Take with you words, even those words which God has furnished you with, and come to him; take a promise in your hand, and come and plead it with God, for the return of his presence and Spirit.

III. *Often make use of your covenant relation to God, in pleading with him, and with your own souls.*—The person that sent in the case under consideration, does not appear to doubt of his being a Christian. The very form in which the question stands, supposes it; and upon this supposition, I proceed to give you this necessary direction. Some indeed may say, they cannot plead *a covenant relation*; for they are greatly in the

dark about it, and are therefore afraid to do it.—In answer to this, in general, *observe*,—So long as you find your viewing, and your pleading your *covenant relation* quickens you, humbles you, sets you against all sin, and tends to fill you with love to Jesus and his service, look upon *this* as an evidence of your interest in the covenant. Plead therefore, my friends, this *covenant relation* to God, if you would have it better with your souls, and would be in such a frame as to maintain *communion* with God.

1. *Plead it with God.* A sense of it tends greatly to give you faith and fervency in prayer; and to fill you with hopes of the divine presence and favour. Here is a glorious argument to make use of with God: rejoice in it, my dear friend, and make frequent use of it. Often throw yourself at the footstool of God's throne, and address him in such language as this: "Lord, am I not thine? Didst thou not, O Father, choose me from eternity, and determine to bestow salvation upon me? Didst thou not, O *mighty God*, undertake for me, agree to put my name in the book of life, and, in consequence of this, come and suffer and die in my stead? And hast thou not renewed me, O *eternal Spirit*, and set the broad seal of heaven upon my soul? If I am not thine, Lord, what mean such instances of communion with Thee? What means this love to Jesus, these desires after a conformity to his image? Are not these as so many evidences of thine everlasting love? And, oh! wilt thou leave me to wither and languish, to grow cold and formal? Wilt thou not come and kindle this sacred spark afresh, and carry on thy work with an almighty efficacy? I acknowledge, Lord, I am unworthy of thy favour: I have sinned, and deserve thy everlasting displeasure. But did it not please thee of thine infinite grace, to enrol my name among thy chosen ones in the volume of eternity? And wilt thou leave me? Lord, it was thine own act, thy free act; and I would humbly plead it. Therefore come and visit my soul, shed abroad thy love in my heart, pardon my backslidings, and may I be enabled to rejoice in thy covenant love, and walk and act as one who has a real interest in it!"—Thus plead with God, and follow the example of the Psalmist, who in all his difficulties, temporal and spiritual, addressed God as his God. O the sweetness, the happiness that is couched in these two words, *my God*!

2. *Often make use of the same argument, and plead this covenant relation with your souls.*—When you find your souls in danger, through sin; when you have lost your frame, and

feel a coldness and formality, and the hurries of the world tempting you to a carelessness in, and a negligence of duty; plead with your souls in some such manner as this:—"O my soul! Am I acting like an heir of glory, to be thus incumbered, thus anxious, and thus careless? What, did the Father love me from eternity, and give me to his Son? Did Jesus suffer and die for me? And has the Spirit actually renewed me? In consequence of all this, is heaven my portion? Am I born to glory? Oh! and what, so cold, so formal? I will not leave thee, O my soul, in this withering condition. I will plead with thee the Father's everlasting kindness: I will beseech thee by the tender compassions of the *Son of God* who gave himself for thee: I will press upon thee, the infinite love of the Spirit, who said unto thee, *live*. I will not leave thee, till I find things better with thee. May not the Father justly complain of thee? Hear, O my soul, what he says, What did I look upon thee from everlasting with infinite kindness, and are these the returns thou art making? Is this like one of my *chosen vessels*? Did I pass by thousands, and look upon thee? And is this all the sense thou hast of thy obligations to me?—Hear Jesus gently chiding thee, O my slothful soul; saying, What, did I love thee so as to die for thee? Was the day of thy redemption upon my heart from everlasting? And shall my cause, my glory, lie so little upon thine? Behold my wounded soul, see my bitter agonies, and all to rescue thee from everlasting death!—And wilt thou not love me more? Hear the Spirit bringing in his charge against thee, and expostulating with thee—Have I not, in consequence of the Father's everlasting love, and the Mediator's purchase, come and brought thee out of darkness into light? What evidences have I given thee of *covenant love*? How have I calmed thy troubled conscience, shed abroad a Saviour's love in thy heart, been a spirit of grace and supplication in thee, and a spirit of adoption too? And what, art thou so ungrateful, so cold, and secure? Thus may God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, upbraid and chide thee, O my soul: And shall not this move thee? Lord, my heart begins to melt; it softens, it yields to so much love! Oh, come and do with me what thou pleasest! May I hate sin; may I love Thee with greater fervency, and view every other earthly enjoyment with indifference, and use all to thy glory." Thus plead your *covenant relation* to God, and all the consequences of it, with your souls. Do it frequently, and you will find it, through the divine blessing, a happy means of enabling you to live above

this world, whilst you are in it ; of humbling you for sin ; of quickening you under all decays ; and of bringing you into a spiritual and heavenly frame, so as to maintain some communion with God, amidst the hurries of life.

IV. *If you would keep up communion with God, whilst you are engaged in the affairs of the world, take care and watch over your frame, your ends, and views.*—You may lawfully follow the world with diligence ; but take care that you pursue those measures that are necessary to keep your hearts at a proper distance from the world, lest they should be too much carried away with it, and entangled in it. Improve what time you can for God. Particularly take care of your frame, before you actually enter upon your secular affairs. Be concerned that the world does not creep into your hearts when you rise in the morning. Your morning-frames are of great importance. Labour to throw aside the world ; and do not enter upon business, till you have earnestly sought the presence and blessing of God with and upon you. Consider well over, in your closets, the affairs of the day, the temptations you are likely to be exposed to ; and be earnest with God for his special presence to keep you : and endeavour to get your hearts impressed with the love of Jesus, and you will be in less danger of being carried away by the temptations of the day. You read in the life of Colonel Gardiner, that that great man had always his two hours with God in the morning. If his regiment was to march at four, he would be up at two. I doubt not but that frame he had in his tent or closet, often went with him through the day. I would not intimate by this, that it is the duty of every one of you, my friends, to spend two hours in your closets every morning ; but I am satisfied, that if no care is taken to set apart some time to God, that person can never be in a flourishing condition, as to his soul. Let me tell you, *early rising* is not only good for the health of the body, but for the health of the soul too, provided some time is spent with God, and communing with our own hearts. O my friends, strive, wrestle with God, in your morning-hours for his presence in the day, and labour to get love to Jesus enkindled in your breasts, before you go out of your closets, and watch over your frame in the day. Examine your *ends and views*, the principles and springs from whence you act. Watch over your deceitful hearts. Walk as in the presence of God. In fine, let the glory of Christ lie near upon your hearts, and be afraid of any thing that may dishonour God, and provoke his spirit to withdraw from you. Thus, in endeavouring to culti-

vate a spiritual frame and temper, and to walk with humility and circumspection, you will give evidence of your being Christians indeed; may expect the presence of God with you, and I doubt not but, through his divine blessing, you will find your souls in a thriving condition. I would now close these few hints with two remarks.

1. *Hence we find that it is not an easy thing to be a flourishing Christian.*—We must live much in the exercise of faith; we must be much upon our guard against sin; we must be much in our closets, seeking God by prayer, examining ourselves, and keeping a strict watch over our hearts, lest they should deceive us. A careless Christian cannot be a flourishing one. If you would grow up like *tall cedars*, and flourish as *trees of righteousness*, you must not be cold and lifeless, careless as to your frames and conversation. Like sentinels, you must be ever upon your watch; like persons running a race, you must be pressing towards the mark with all your might; and, like soldiers, you must be prepared for the battle, and enter the field with your armour on, that you may get daily advantages over your spiritual enemies, and may go from strength to strength, from one degree of grace unto another. To be lively Christians, such as glorify God in every circumstance of life, requires grace to be much in exercise, much of the presence of God, and constant supplies out of our Redeemer's inexhaustible fulness.

2. *We should each be concerned to inquire how it is with our souls; and, if we are upon the decline, to attend unto the directions that have been given.*—Put off a matter of such vast importance no longer; but examine whether you are Christians indeed, or not; and in what circumstances, whether thriving or declining: and if you are upon the decline, let me entreat you to consider what has been said upon this subject, and think it *high time to awake out of sleep*. Oh, if you have any concern for the honour of Christ, any concern for the peace and welfare of your precious souls, labour to have things better with you. Let your loins be girt, and your lights burning: and may none of us be under the least alarm, when death approaches, but then, through grace, be enabled to say, *We have fought the good fight, we have finished our course; we have kept the faith.* Henceforth there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give us at that day; and not to us only, but also to all those that love his appearing. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

CASE III.

A serious person, who scruples to comply with the usual practice of playing at cards, desires to know, whether these scruples arise from a needless tenderness of conscience, or, from the faithful monitions of the Spirit of God?

[The above Question is grounded upon, and extracted from, the following epistle:]

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I HUMBLY take liberty to recommend to your consideration, a subject which has been of great concern to my mind. In time past I had a great liking to, and frequently practised, the *game of cards* without remorse, as most young people, I believe, do. But, since I have tasted that the Lord is gracious, (which I hope is my happy case,) I directly laid aside the general practice of it, as what I apprehend unbecoming the Christian character. I have withstood frequent temptations offered for a compliance; but, once being in a company warm for the game, on their solicitation I complied, but not without sharp reproofs of conscience. On which I secretly purposed to have no more to do therewith, and have hitherto kept my resolution. Whether my refusals are needless scruples of conscience, or faithful monitions from God, is my query. And, as the season is coming on, in which the game of cards is commonly practised, and I may possibly fall in the way of temptation hereto, I am desirous to know, if by compliance, I shall sin against God, and (if so) wherein the evil thereof particularly consists.

“ I am, Sir,

“ Yours, &c.”

P.S. I leave it to your judgment to frame a question from these thoughts, suitable to the occasion.

As such a conscientious spirit runs through the above epistle, I think it may speak the language of many hearts, and therefore the more readily address myself to the consideration of the subject.

The serious request contained in the foregoing letter, cannot

be answered without entering into the merits of the cause; for there is no other way of knowing whether the scruples in our minds, as to any particular practice, be needless or just, but by applying to the divine word, as the rule of duty, to see what we can gather from thence by just consequence concerning the point. So far, therefore, as my judgment reaches, I would endeavour seriously and faithfully to recommend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Let me first speak a few things, which agree to the game of cards along with other diversions in common; and then consider what is peculiar to this game, and others of a similar kind: and so by degrees show you, wherein, and how far, it is lawful or unlawful. And,

1. This diversion, with every other, is certainly evil, *whensoever it is attended with these circumstances, that are detrimental and disgraceful*: if it be practised with wicked company; if it is pursued at unseasonable hours; if it infringes upon the regular duties, civil or religious, of the family; if it puts by, or drives into a corner, the secret duties of the closet; if it occasions the laying of high stakes, or stirs up the corruptions of anger, envy, revenge, or lays a foundation for swearing, quarrels, and confusions.

And it is still more peculiarly abominable, whenever persons hearts are so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as to presume upon the practice on the *Lord's-day*.

Those who are acquainted with this game, and indulge a free use of it, cannot but be sensible, that it is *very, very often* attended with such abominable circumstances; and as it is for the most part attended with, or productive of these evils, therefore every one that has any sense of religion, and any conscience towards God, should be very wary and cautious how he ventures upon it.

2. This diversion, with every other, is certainly evil, *so far as it is a disgrace and dishonour to the profession of religion*.

For a professor to give himself up to *any* diversion immoderately, is a reproach to him. But for a professor of Christianity to be a professed cardplayer, is a brand, and infamy. When any of them are known to be followers of this practice, their characters are sunk in the esteem of all truly serious Christians and gospel-churches; and this report spread concerning them, or this practice seen amongst them, raises their credit only among the loose, gay, and vain part of the world, and exceedingly hardens the hearts of those who have not set God before them.

And that this is a reproachful diversion, is practically and publicly acknowledged by the form of the indentures whereby youths are bound apprentices; for in these indentures they are bound to abstain from *cards* and *dice*, and other unlawful games. And doubtless this form was established in those indentures, under a conviction that these diversions are peculiarly ensnaring to youth.

If therefore professors have any conscientious regard for their reputation as Christians, they are bound from this principle to abstain from the disreputable practice.

3. This diversion, with every other, is certainly evil, *so far as it is ensnaring in its own nature*. Now it is very evident, from matter of fact, that this game has something peculiarly bewitching and entangling in it. How strongly does it captivate the affections, how strangely does it draw away the heart, and how powerful is its efficacy to fill the mind with vanity, to such a degree, that a person must be extremely upon his guard to escape receiving an unspeakable prejudice to his soul. This diversion therefore must be certainly unlawful, when it bewitches the mind, and produces vanity and carnality of affection. Besides, it is known, that this game has some such pernicious pleasure in it, as actually enamours the affections, and makes persons to be extremely fond of it, and set upon it, as if it was a matter of the highest importance to have opportunities for it, and to be indulged in it. And, generally speaking, so efficacious is this influence upon the mind, that all arguments and persuasions, all warnings, nay, and the very experience of disadvantages arising from it, prove altogether too weak to detach the mind from it. Many persons are so fond of it, that they will forego almost every thing, rather than be debarred from the infatuating pleasure. With what unaccountable eagerness do some pursue it! how are they vexed and grieved at heart, when disappointed of a game! and what resentment rises in their minds against those, who are so faithful as to reprove or debar them! And that person must be accounted a precisian, an enthusiast, an enemy to pleasure, who attempts to speak a word against it. Whenever matters are run to such a length as this, or to any thing like it, it is an evidence that the gamesters are absolutely intoxicated with carnal pleasure.

4. This diversion, with every other, must certainly be evil, *when it unfits the soul for spiritual duties*. It is readily granted, that some diversions are certainly lawful; and it is as readily allowed, that some diversion is really necessary: but then it is

only so far as it is suited to unbend the mind for a season from severer thought, or to relax the body, to render it the more capable to perform necessary duty. Diversion is graciously allowed and designed to fit the body and mind for spiritual and natural duties. But surely a *gracious person* must acknowledge the following maxim to be just: That, whatsoever diversions do actually unfit the frame and spirit of the mind for devotional exercises, they so far prove themselves to be hurtful and criminal. And, therefore, every person, that has any regard for the power of godliness in his own soul, must judge and condemn himself as guilty before God, whenever he engages in such diversions, or to such a degree, as to unfit his soul for this communion with God. And if every professor did seriously attend to this rule, and examine himself by this test, I doubt not but he would soon be obliged to decline this practice from his own experience. Give me leave here to put one question to your consciences,—a question that needs to be put seriously to you, and by you to yourselves.

Whether, after a game at cards, you do not actually find yourselves hereby unfitted for spiritual devotion? And I strongly suspect, that if every one of you, who know what communion with God means, would be faithful to yourselves, you would all of you find, by sad experience, that this game is an absolute enemy to vital religion.

Having brought this subject down thus into experience itself, I will beg leave to offer the following considerations to your thoughts. Since this game is found to be so peculiarly attended with many evils, to be so peculiarly dishonourable and infatuating; and to be in fact such an enemy to vital godliness, What can be the reason hereof? Is there not some ground to suspect that it is *evil in itself*? If it be *not* so, how comes it to pass, that such evils should necessarily cleave to it, or be necessarily produced by it? but, if it be *unlawful*, wherein does the particular evil of it consist? Far would I be from exaggerating matters of any kind unjustly; though I am apprehensive that many who may see these lines, will imagine, that an attempt to prove this game to be evil in *itself*, must be owing to an overnicety, preciseness, or scrupulosity of conscience. But let me crave your patience a little, while I attempt to display my thoughts upon this head with all freedom and plainness.

The whole I have to say upon this subject, is founded upon a plain, but too much neglected passage of sacred writ: Prov. xvi. 33. *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord*; that is, whenever a lot is cast, the entire

decision or determination of it is from Jehovah himself. He claims it as his sole prerogative. This proverb will appear to be true concerning all sorts of lots, whether *civil* or *religious*, wheresoever, howsoever, or whensoever they may be cast. For, in all cases whatsoever, when a lot is cast, and cast fairly, an event is thereby rendered casual and uncertain; and it is *not* within the reach of human skill or power to ascertain, foresee, or determine the event; and, if it be beyond human contrivance or art to decide the affair, to whom then does it belong, or whose prerogative is it? Whoever therefore believes the universal providence of God, must of necessity acknowledge, that *all events* universally are under the divine direction, more especially those that are *casual*. And, if God is to be owned in those events that come upon us daily, unforeseen, unsuspected and undesigned by any creature; surely divine providence ought to be *still more especially* regarded by us, whensoever we *voluntarily* render an event uncertain and casual. We must therefore conclude from the above plain text, and the reasoning upon it, that we ought in no case designedly to render an event casual with respect to us, without some real dependence upon, and submission to, divine providence. With which frame of spirit lots may be cast or established upon proper occasions, without any harm or crime.* And, without some such frame of mind in casting or receiving a lot, we are really defective in our regard to Jehovah as a God of providence, even supposing the occasion of the lot to be proper and justifiable. But, if we venture to cast a lot upon trivial occasions, such occasions as it would be profaneness to address Jehovah in, we are then guilty of trifling with that, which ought to be treated with a serious regard to the Lord, as the supreme Decider of all events; and especially of those, whose decision we *designedly* put out of our own reach.

It may perhaps here be readily asked, What reference has all this reasoning to the present subject? Or how can this be applied to the game of cards and dice? Let me then briefly state this affair to you, with a view to the diversion in question.

I confess, that in this game much of the success depends upon the skill and attention of a person who engages in it; for a skillful player can sometimes make a greater advantage of a *bad* hand, than others can of a *good* hand. But still,

* In cases of necessity and importance, where we cannot, without falling into destructive contentions, decide a point in question, the Lord graciously permits us to refer the decision of the affair to himself by lot, provided we do it with a proper eye to him, as the grand arbiter and disposer. *The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.* Prov. xviii. 18.

whether a person should have a good or bad hand, depends entirely upon the cutting, shuffling, and dealing out of the cards; and this is a very important circumstance in the game. I shall put the affair of a lot in the present case only upon this issue: He that shuffles, or cuts and deals out the cards, either does it *fairly* or *unfairly*. If it be done *unfairly*, then here is cheating, knavery, fraud, and dishonesty practised in the game. But, if he does it *fairly*, it is done in such a manner, that no person can foresee which side should have the advantage: so then here is an event designedly put into a properly casual or uncertain state: and this is, this can be, no other than the very act of casting a lot. So that we are necessarily reduced to this dilemma, that either a lot is cast, or the game is conducted in a cheating dishonest way. Therefore, if justice takes place in the game, here is an event of considerable consequence in the play, designedly put out of the decision of human skill, forethought, or contrivance; and so the decision of this event must necessarily be referred elsewhere, to some invisible power.

Can it then be improper or unnecessary to ask, whither the decision is referred? Is it to God, to the devil, or to *chance and fortune*? If the decision be referred to God himself, as a God of providence, this can be esteemed no less than *profaneness*: and we are assured, that God *will not account him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain*. And can we, with any seriousness or decency, at a game of cards, say, in our hearts, Lord, *give a perfect equitable lot*? I know we cannot; *you* know we cannot. Such language of heart or action can never be esteemed decent in diversion; and those, who have any seriousness in their spirits, are far from the thought, and cannot bear the reflection in their own consciences.

I ask then farther, if the decision be not referred to the Lord, is it to the devil? No, by no means; you will say. This you detest as much as the former, as it has a species of *witchcraft* in it. It only then remains that the reference is made to *chance* or *nothing*. To say that it is referred to *nothing*, is to say that it is *not referred at all*, which is contrary to matter of fact; because the event is actually and designedly referred away from yourselves, and from all human skill and contrivance. And therefore it must be referred to *luck, chance, or fortune*. This thought is more tolerable than the former: and it is extremely evident that the reference is made *hither*, from the universal language which obtains in this diversion; in which nothing is more common than to talk about *luck, chance, and fortune*. But remember then, if the reference be

made to *chance*, what is this but substituting, practically substituting, *fortune* in the room of divine providence? which is a species of *heathenism* and *idolatry*.

It may be said indeed, in order to satisfy or sooth the conscience, that you have no thought or design in shuffling the cards to make an appeal or reference to any whatever, neither to God, the devil, nor *chance*, and therefore you cannot be chargeable with either of these suggested or supposed evils. But it is easy to reply, that though your remote intention be only to divert yourselves, and to conduct the game fairly, yet a more immediate design professedly intervenes; namely, it is your actual intention, if you are honest and fair, to put an event out of your own reach, and out of the reach of your partner and company, in order for you to divert yourselves by it, and upon it. And if you do designedly and professedly refer the event away from the determination of all human skill and forethought, it highly becomes you, who cast this lot, seriously to inquire whither you refer it then; remembering at the same time, that whatever your thought be, or whether you have any thought about it or no, it is still a *universal* truth, that when the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposal of it is of the Lord. Say not, O professor, that the providence of God has nothing to do with such trifling concerns; for whether we will or no, the above quoted text is, and must be, of universal extent. Are these concerns too trivial for divine providence, when *not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, and the very hairs of our heads are all numbered?* Matt. x. 29, 30.

I am sorry that I am obliged to inculcate and enforce such plain and universal truths, because they are so evidently infringed upon, even by professors themselves, through their being habitually ignorant of the evil included in chance diversions. And surely those amusements can scarcely be called harmless, whose innocency can be no otherwise supported, than by excluding, contracting, or abridging the providence of God.

But I have another serious thought to offer to your consideration, which I cannot but conceive must have some weight in it to a serious mind. You know in yourselves, that, whensoever this lot is cast in the diversion, you are more or less concerned about or concerned with, the event in your minds: your affections are more or less at work, in any way of expectation and hope, to see what advantages chance will give you, or deprive you of, in the game. And the difference

is not very great, if you play but for a trifle, or even for nothing: for every person is in some degree solicitous and desirous to have the advantage of a good hand, either from a principle of *interest* or *honour*. For, if you are totally indifferent about the event of the game, and about having the advantage in it, you actually lose all pleasure and amusement in the diversion. It is this hope and concern that is the *spring* of all the pleasure attending the diversion to you; and it is this that keeps your attention to it. Accordingly there is in some degree a hope of having a good hand; or a fear of having a bad hand; and a certain joy and pleasure, if the *former* falls to your lot, and a certain sorrow or grief, if the *latter* comes to your share, by the shuffling and dealing out of the cards.

Let me then entreat you seriously to reflect what these affections of the mind are excited by; what they are built upon; what is their object and their foundation. Is it not *chance, luck, or fortune*? If not, what else can be the ground of these motions and affections, from whence the primary pleasures of the amusement spring? Certainly you agree to refer the decision of the event, (which raises these internal motions, these hopes, fears, or dependencies,) away from all the creatures, from all human skill and power, unto *chance* or *fortune*; and if so, is not this an *experimental*, as well as a *constructive* substitution of fortune in the room of providence? See whether this is not the true state of the case, whenever your minds are in any measure agitated with hopes or fears, pleasure or sorrow about the goodness or badness of the hand. And if this be, or so far as it is, the spring of your attention to, and pleasure in the game, what name shall we give to this sort of pleasure? And can we wonder that it should be so peculiarly ensnaring and intoxicating, as we generally find it to be?

But, if what has been said in the way of reasoning upon the nature of a lot, and the necessary workings of the mind, upon the event decided thereby, does not convey any conviction, I would try one more method, and that is by making a plain and close appeal to the hearts and consciences of those that have any thing of the fear of God before their eyes, concerning the working of their minds, the sentiments of their hearts, and the words of their lips, in the practice of these amusements.

It is possible, you may think there is very little in what has been said, concerning the nature and design of a lot. Be it so then: but let us next see what are the unavoidable conse-

quences and effects of thus trifling with providence under the feigned name of *luck* and *fortune* : for frequently the innocency or evil of any thing is best seen in the immediate and universal fruits and effects.

Now I will venture to affirm that this very practice *generally*, and as it were *necessarily*, produces these effects upon professors : 1. Heathenish sentiments ; 2. Heathenish language ; 3. Heathenish affections ; all which together often introduce, 4. Heathenish practices. You may well be startled at the very proposal of these particulars. However, all that I desire is that you would give them that weight which, upon a proper examination, they appear to have in fact upon yourselves and your experience.

1. *Heathenish sentiments* appear to be the unavoidable consequences of this practice. It actually contracts your notions of divine providence. It makes you ready to imagine, that God leaves some events to chance or fortune. And indeed you dare not be clear, consistent, and properly extensive in your sentiments, concerning the divine determination of casual events ; without making some breach upon, or causing some suspicions in, your consciences concerning this practice, wherein you professedly agree to refer the determination of an event wherewith you are concerned, away from yourselves, you know not *whither*, or at least dare not think whether it is in fact referred according to the true doctrine of providence.

This diversion naturally leads you into an opinion, that chance presides over and rules the game ; that fortune sometimes takes one side, and sometimes another, in a sort of arbitrary way. It naturally tends to make you think that some persons are lucky and fortunate, while others are unlucky and unfortunate. To which we may add, that there is a multitude of heathenish notions arising from, or making their way into your minds ; such as, that fortune smiles upon some, and frowns upon others ; that, if the cards are shuffled in some other manner, or if we change our places, &c. this will turn the power of chance another way. Let me ask you freely, Whether you do not find that such imaginations gradually obtain some place in your minds ? and surely these conceptions are not only idle, but heathenish, and foolish in the highest degree, and have more evil and infection in them than we may at first view be ready to allow. I am indeed very sensible, that no judicious, conscientious Christian can, in his sober thoughts, embrace such opinions ; but yet a frequent practice

of these games will unavoidably leave the infection of them upon the imagination; and that sometimes to such a degree, that a person actually desires to divert himself this way, because of the amusement and entertainment he finds in seeing, as he thinks, how fortune shifts sides, desiring and hoping that it may turn about in his own favour. All this will be farther confirmed by observing,

2. That *heathenish language* appears to be the unavoidable consequence of this practice. How constantly do we hear the terms, *luck, chance, fortune*, in the process of this game! How freely do the gamesters talk of *lucky persons, lucky hands*, and *fortunate or unfortunate places*! This every one knows is the dialect of the card-table. And let me ask thee, O professor, whether such expressions as these are fit for the lips of a *Christian*? One would rather think that the very sound of them must be offensive to his ears, and drive him away from the diversion, when he knows that the whole of this phraseology is expressive of sentiments directly opposite to the Christian doctrine of divine providence. Yea farther,

3. *Heathenish affections* are the unavoidable consequence of this diversion. From hence naturally arise such motions of the soul as these:—a wishing that fortune may favour us, a hope that it will, and a real dependence upon it for our success in the play;—a grieving and being uneasy at our fortune, if we be particularly unlucky, an envying another whom fortune seems to favour more than us;—a being pleased and rejoiced when a good hand comes to our share, and then in our minds insulting over those that are not so happy and prosperous in that respect. And as all persons know that the success of the game very much depends upon chance, therefore, so far as a person's heart is concerned with the event, by reason of his interest or honour being involved in it, so far these various affections of the soul are unavoidably moved. So that here is a vast variety of passions fixed upon chance, and excited by it. The desire is towards it, the dependence is upon it; and when it frowns, there is either a submission to it, or a fretting at it, or envying and grieving at the fortunateness of another. And it cannot but be acknowledged, that these affections, thus excited, frequently work with great strength, and visibly discover themselves in the countenance, words, and actions. Now some of these affections are evil in themselves; such as fretfulness and envy. They all of them are generally agitated to an immoderate degree; and even these affections, such as

hope, fear, submission, dependence, and joy, which are lawful in themselves, become heathenish and criminal so far as they have *fortune* for their object and motive.

And were we to try at giving another turn to our account of these affections, and suppose them to be excited not by chance, but by the view of the divine decision; this would only make the matter worse, by introducing apparent profaneness. For certainly you would not choose to call the pleasure in having a good hand thankfulness to God, nor this submission, if you have a bad hand, a submission to the divine providence; any more than you would choose to call any degree of fretfulness or envy in the game a fretting at the divine disposal, or envying another the advantage God has given him.*

Look therefore into your own experiences under such diversions, and see how far these sentiments, this language, and these motions of heart are chargeable upon you; and then you will be obliged to allow that the game is very pernicious and intoxicating to you, whether you will grant the justness of the foregoing reasonings upon the nature of a lot, or no. Though one can scarcely think, that a person, who finds and observes these heathenish effects upon him, should be at any loss to judge from whence they proceed; since the very nature of these evil experiences, and the very nature of the evil that is in them, proclaim, that they are a practical and experimental substitution of *fortune* in the room of *providence*. Upon these principles and observations, we need not wonder, if a fondness for, and a pursuit of, this diversion produce,

4. *Heathenish practices and effects.* It naturally tends to make persons lose their reverence for God in the common affairs of life, to make them forget that *casual* events are under the disposal of the Great Governor of the universe, by ascribing them to chance, without looking any higher. It tends to draw off the heart from God, and to discompose the spirit for devotional exercises. It fills the mind with such imaginations, sentiments, wishes, hopes, and dependencies, as are unsuitable to a serious Christian, destructive to the power of godliness, and are a never-failing hinderance to the spirit of devotion. It

* In other diversions, wherein the success *entirely* depends upon the exertion of our own skill or strength, there is no such snare; because therein our hopes or fears, &c. are founded upon a reality, and may therefore be very innocent. But in *chance-games* a person is in the utmost danger of letting his affections loose upon *that*, which, if it be any thing, is, and can be, no other, than the Divine Providence, which certainly ought not to be thus played and trifled with.

generally precludes the worship of God in the family and closet, or drives it into a corner. And as a relish for this diversion increases, so, in proportion, a regard to, and a relish for, spiritual vital religion declines; and those that are the most attached to it, are such as live without God in the world.

All this may be turned into an address to all those that occupy themselves in these diversions. Are there any of you, whose consciences are struck by these representations and appeals? How deeply ought you to be humbled before the Lord, that you have walked in the counsel of the ungodly, have stood in the way of sinners, and have even sat in the seat of the scorner! Beg of God the Holy Spirit to fasten the conviction in your hearts, *as a nail in a sure place*, that you may be never more polluted with these corruptions.

But are there any of you, who make a profession of religion, who still are found in, and are fond of, these practices? Give me leave to expostulate matters with you: What is there in this diversion, that is so relishable and enchanting to *you*? Is the pleasure so great, or have you such a regard for your *honour* or *interest* at a game of cards, as to bring them into competition with your reputation as Christians, or the interest of your precious souls?

I would fain hope that many of you dare not pursue this game with those circumstances of evil, that most do, by attending to it at unseasonable hours, with high stakes, in public or vain and irreligious company, &c. If any of you are going on in this way, I must proclaim, there is not the fear of God before your eyes; and your profession of religion is no other than a snare to your own souls, and a means of hardening the hearts of others.

But are there not some, nay, many of you, that make no scruple of this game *occasionally*? You satisfy your minds with this thought, that you practise it but seldom, and that at convenient times and in proper company, and can therefore see no harm in it, or find any bad effects from it. Come, let us seriously inquire into this matter. Though you may avoid swearing, quarrelling, bad society, and unseasonable hours in this game, does it follow, that it is therefore *harmless* to you? Have you never observed how unfit your frames have been for spiritual devotion after it? Have you never observed it to be a means of contracting or setting aside your family and closet duties? Have you never observed what ill effects this occasional practice has upon your children and servants? To come closer; can you avoid its polluting your own minds with unchristian

imaginings, or its defiling your lips with a language contrary to the language of Canaan? For my part, I could never see that, when Christians meet together upon this amusement, they could avoid this heathenish phraseology, or these heathenish perturbations of mind in the game, more than others. And although it is too natural for you to make light of these things, yet I must affirm, that these workings of affection, and these forms of language, you are led into hereby, are far from being trivial crimes. I know indeed, that things of this nature appear very trifling and inconsiderable to those who do not pay a spiritual regard to the first risings of the mind, or to the idle words they speak. But surely, if you have any considerable degree of the fear of God before your eyes, and the love of Christ in your hearts, you will think it your indispensable duty to avoid the hearing of that which is so heathenish, and to keep yourselves from being drawn into those sentiments and affections, which such language expresses. These things have undoubtedly in them a species of *enthusiasm* and *infatuation*, as hereby the thoughts, the affections, and language, are conversant about a *nonentity*, (for such is *chance* and *fortune*, separate from the providence of God :) and what can be more irrational, what can debase human nature more, than for to have its hopes, desires, and dependencies, founded and fixed upon what is really nothing? And according to the scriptural and rational account of what you are conversant with in these games, you have the highest reason to suspect yourselves to be guilty of, or upon the very margin of, *profaneness* and *idolatry*.

I must now commit the whole to your serious consideration, and to the divine blessing, desiring you to remember, that, as it is a game so very dishonourable to professors, so very detrimental in its tendency, and so very infatuating in its influence, its lawfulness in itself must be justly suspected. It must be the safest way to abstain from it entirely; and cannot but be hazardous to practise it upon any occasion. If you would keep your consciences clear, and abstain from all appearance of evil, it is highly necessary you should keep at a distance from this diversion, lest your ears should be defiled with heathenish sounds, your lips with heathenish language, your mind with heathenish sentiments, and your heart with heathenish affections. And do not think it an easy matter to avoid these evils, while you fall into the practice; for, if you truly attend to, and examine your own hearts, you will find it really impossible to indulge the game, and avoid the snare of it.

As for you who go on voluntarily and presumptuously in this diversion, making it your constant practice and your great delight, to the neglect or contempt of family or closet religion; it is very evident, that you have not the fear of God before your eyes. And, however easy your consciences may be in the midst of these pursuits, yet take this solemn hint along with you, that for *every evil thought*, and for *every idle word*, you must give an account *in the day of judgment*. Matt. xii. 36.

CASE IV.

How may a person judge when a promise or threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?

[This question you will find contained in the following letter:]

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I AM a person who have for some years been a professed follower of Jesus, have had a place in his house, enjoyed great privileges, and have had advantages above many, sitting under a sound, faithful, and tender minister. But, under these means of fruitfulness, I, alas! seem barren and unprofitable, and am afraid I go backward in religion, and make advances in sin: and what is worse, my heart is so hard, that I do not mourn over these declensions as I ought; and therefore fear I am not properly affected with them. No sooner does a temptation offer, but I fall in with it; so that I often think, whether my refraining from gross immoralities is not more for want of temptations than from a real hatred of them, and love to holiness. And yet I hope I sincerely strive, and pray, and resolve against sin in Christ's strength, being convinced that I have none sufficient of my own. But can I sincerely do this, and fall so frequently? I attend on gospel-ordinances; but, I fear, to little purpose, being cold and lifeless under all. I hear the love of Jesus sweetly displayed; but this icy frozen heart is not melted; these languid and lifeless affections not raised to, nor fixed upon, the dear Redeemer. I cannot call him *my*

Redeemer, lest I should be deceiving my own soul; and yet I dare not say I have no part in him, lest I should be ungrateful, and deny his work. Thus I am in a strait: but this I must say, that I desire to call the glorious Saviour *my Lord* and *my God*. Another thing that appears discouraging is this:—In an answer to a question some time since, you proved that Satan did often produce passages of scripture to terrify the trembling Christian. Now, this being the case, may he not transform himself into an angel of light, bring promises to our minds, and so deceive us? If so, how can a poor creature judge when a promise or threatening comes from God, or from Satan; especially when sometimes promises have seemed to be sweetly, seasonably, and powerfully set home upon the soul, and afterwards awful threatenings have appeared to come with equal strength? I beg you will take these things into your consideration, if you think them of sufficient importance: and may the Eternal Spirit, whose work it is, direct you to a suitable answer, that I may be capable of judging, in some measure, of my condition; whether I am but a painted hypocrite, or a real, though I am sure then, a poor unworthy believer! Oh, that I could experience this made good to my soul! *They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength.* Now God is faithful, and the promise is absolute; *they shall, &c.* Surely, then, if I waited properly on the Lord, or was within the bond of the everlasting covenant; this would be my case. I think if I am more lifeless at one time than another, it is at the Lord's supper: so that I sometimes think, I should sin less in neglecting, than in attending in such an unbecoming frame, as I almost constantly do. O hard rebellious heart! Stupid and ungrateful creature! surely, could you see my vileness, you would never judge favourably of my state."

THIS case consists of a variety of particulars, which it would not be well to pass over without notice. I would therefore,

I. Consider some of the particular circumstances here mentioned; and then,

II. Answer this important question, How a person may judge whether a promise or a threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?

1. Let us take a view of the particular circumstances or complaints, of which this case consists.—These, we find, are various. Here is *barrenness and unfruitfulness* under abundant means mentioned. Here is *coldness and lifelessness* complained of. Here is *a fear of going backward*, and yet a mind not

suitably affected with it. This person particularly complains of *deadness at the Lord's supper*, and of *being carried away with temptations*; which occasions a fear, *lest his abstaining from gross immoralities does not arise rather from a want of temptations, than from a hatred of sin, and a love to holiness.* He is in a strait, whether to conclude he has an *interest in Christ or not.* He is afraid that his frequent falls are inconsistent with an *experience of the grace of God.* And lastly, he is ready to conclude, that he should *sin less in neglecting, than in attending the ordinance of the Lord's supper, because of his great coldness there.* These are the various complaints this person makes; complaints all which are suitable to the experience of the Christian, and which therefore deserve consideration. Time indeed forbids our taking particular notice of every one: yet I would not wholly neglect them; and therefore shall make a few general observations, which will refer in some respect to them all, and tend to direct, encourage, and strengthen the Christian under his various fears.

1. *It is an unspeakable mercy, when we have a deep and humbling sense of our barrenness, deadness, and unprofitableness, and to be enabled to spread it before the Lord.* Some persons are mere cumberers of the ground indeed. They bring forth no real fruit, and yet are entirely unconcerned about it. They enjoy all the privileges of the gospel, are favoured with all the means of grace; and yet are absolutely unaffected with the great concerns of eternity, are strangers to all real religion; but, notwithstanding all think well of themselves, and, hypocrite-like, say, *Stand by thyself, and come not near us; for we are holier than thou.* Awful to be in such a condition! but is this your case, my dear friend? You find a coldness and indifferency under these means, and are afraid you are rather going backward than forward. You complain of hardness and insensibility; but remember, *felt hardness is not real hardness.* It is rather a blessing, than a judgment, and therefore calls for thankfulness. It is a stupidity *felt, and lamented over,* and not like the absolute stupidity of the impenitent sinner. Do you not carry your complaints to God, and tell him of your coldness, your fears, your insensibility? Do you not appear humble in your own eyes on this account? Are you not accusing yourself of your ingratitude, and abhorring yourself for your vileness? This is no evidence of a hypocrite, but rather of a real Christian. A hypocrite that abstains from outward immoralities, thinks all is well with him; but the Christian appears vile and odious in his own eyes on account of the sinfulness of his heart,

Though he has no public sins to charge himself with, yet, when he looks within, he finds enough to make himself appear vile and despicable. It is a peculiar mercy to be made sensible of the plague, the wickedness, the coldness of our hearts, and to be deeply humbled under it. The Spirit of God always shows the Christian what he is, that he may the more readily acquiesce in the method of salvation exhibited in the gospel. Be thankful, then, Christians, that your souls are not absolutely frozen and benumbed, but that you are sensible of, alarmed at, and humbled for your indifferency and lukewarmness, barrenness, and unfruitfulness, under the means of grace.

2. *It is a good evidence of our being Christians indeed, when we are not easy and contented under such a sense of our barrenness and coldness, but find our hearts filled with desires, and are enabled to endeavour after greater holiness.* Are you satisfied with complaints? or do you think it is enough to mention them? Do you willingly rest here? Do you find no self-aborrence on the account of these things, no desires after liveliness of soul, no concern to have things better with you? Do you not pray for, endeavour and strive after, greater degrees and measures of grace? Then you are asleep indeed, and it is high time to awake! It is an awful circumstance to be like the door on its hinges, and to have no desire after an alteration! To sit down and feebly *wish* to be better, but cannot find a heart to pray and endeavour after a more spiritual frame, and a growing conformity to God! This is sometimes pretty nearly the case with the Christian, when he is under the power of any particular corruption. Sin has caused a too great insensibility in his soul, and all his spiritual powers appear asleep, as was the case with David, when Nathan came to him. But is it thus with you, my Christian mourner? May I not answer for you, and say, No? Are you satisfied to be in such a condition? Do you not desire and long to have it otherwise with you! Nay, do you not pray, and cry, and strive to have all things altered with you? Are you contented with a few feeble wishes? Sometimes, my friend, you may appear to yourself to be in such a condition; but at other times are you not full of holy concern about it? Do not you call upon your sleepy soul to awake? Do not you beg to feel the love of Christ melting your hard and stony heart? Before duties, are you not concerned to be kept from coldness and indifferency? and, at the close of duties, are you not humbled and ashamed under a view of your great imperfections, and do you not apply afresh to the blood of Christ for pardon?

and is not all this an evidence of the Christian? Is there not in all this a sense of the excellency of holiness, a real love to it, and therefore an evidence of a work of grace in the heart? Oh bless God, that it is thus with you; that you can appeal to him; that you would have your soul filled with greater love to him, and brought into a warmer and more lively frame!

3. *We should not make our fluctuating frames, nor our being led away by a particular temptation, a mark of our being hypocrites.* We are not to judge of ourselves by one particular action in our lives, or by an unbecoming frame, that we may through the power of temptation be led into; but by the general tendency of our desires, frames, and conversation. Sometimes you find all dark within: you cannot call Christ your Saviour. Sometimes you find a sad benumbedness: your soul seems like the earth in winter-frost, hard and incapable of impression: the love of a compassionate Saviour does not melt you, when you hear it. All this is consistent with a real experience of the grace of God. These different frames are not uncommon. What must we conclude from them? They only show us the difference between earth and heaven, intimate the state of imperfection we are in, and the sad influence of sin even in a renewed heart; but do not by any means give us reason to conclude that we are but *almost-christians*. The hypocrite is generally in one frame; but the Christian's frames are ever fluctuating. His sky is not always clear: but as the natural sky is sometimes serene, and appears beautiful and pleasant, and again is stormy, dark, and tempestuous; so is it with a Christian's soul. Do not then draw any discouraging conclusion from your various frames. Let a consideration of it keep you humble, make you watchful, and fill you with warmer desires after the heavenly world, where your love will never grow cool, nor your enjoyments meet with any interruption; but do not conclude from hence, that you are not Christians indeed.

4. *We should ever maintain a godly jealousy over our hearts, yet we should take care and guard against unbelief.* We should ever rejoice with trembling. Upon every eruption of sin, and interruption in our frame, we should take the alarm, inquire into the reason of it, and watch the heart with all diligence, knowing that it is *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. Yet we are not to give way to disputings and unbelief, because our hearts are treacherous; for, if so, we may be always under the power of distressing fears, and never enjoy any satisfaction or peace, saying, we may be deceived. There

is a great difference between a godly jealousy and unbelief. If after examination our consciences do not condemn us, we have no reason to be uneasy. This person knows not what conclusion to draw concerning himself. He is afraid to say he is a Christian, there are so many circumstances that appear discouraging; and yet he would not deny what God has done for him. Do not hesitate between two opinions. If, so far as you know your own heart, you have been enabled to give up yourself to Jesus Christ, and receive him in all his characters; if your conscience does not contradict you, when you say, you hope you love the Redeemer; you may, and ought to draw a favourable conclusion concerning your state, and to wait for the clearer testimony of the Spirit to make it plain to you. Do not, my friends, be always disputing: that can be of no service to your souls. It will break in upon your peace, dishonour God, and perhaps provoke him to leave you in the dark. Oh, hope and trust! Do not cast away your confidence. Endeavour to live in a thankful frame, considering what God has done for you, and rejoice in the evidences of his distinguishing grace, and give God all the glory.

5. *We may be growing Christians, and yet not find our affections always lively.* If we judge of our state and of our progress in grace by affection, we shall be in danger either of running into all the wild reveries of enthusiasm, or else of falling into despair. Affections may be raised, and yet there be no grace: and, on the other hand, we may have our affections dull, or seem almost to be void of affections, when compared with some persons; and yet we may not only have grace, but be growing in grace. Our affections may not be lively, and our souls all on fire; and yet we may really love Christ, and be making some progress in the divine life. Young Christians are often led by affection; therefore their hopes are ever fluctuating. If they are not lively, they conclude they are no better than hypocrites. Constitution makes a great difference as to the liveliness or dulness of our affections; and so does the present state of the body: and these things should be always considered. Some can weep at pleasure, whilst others are incapable of shedding a tear. Some appear all alive, others are of a heavier cast, and yet are solid growing Christians, and have a rich experience in divine things. It is doubtless pleasant and profitable too, to have our affections raised by divine truths. When our chariot-wheels move on swiftly and the fire burns within us, it is sweet meditating, praying, reading, hearing, or conversing. Yet we must not judge of the work

of God in the soul by the liveliness of our affections altogether. Indeed, when a person, naturally of lively affections, finds a growing coldness and indifferency to spiritual duties, and is all alive when pursuing the things of sense, it is a sad sign at least of a bad frame. But though he does not find his soul lively in duty; yet, if he is labouring after a greater deadness to the world; if he is secretly mourning after God, and lamenting over sin; if he is pressing on towards the mark, and seeking after a greater conformity to Jesus; if he is more careful against sin, and watchful over his own heart; he is a growing Christian, though in waiting upon God he may not find his affections so lively as he would. The tree does not only grow in summer, when it appears in all its gaiety; but even in winter, when it appears to the eye as dead. So the Christian in his winter-seasons may grow in humility, in a knowledge of his own heart, and in love to Christ and holiness, though clouds and darkness are round about him, and his countenance may wear an awful gloom.

6. *Lifelessness and coldness in ordinances ought not to discourage us from waiting upon God in them.* If we must leave off waiting upon God for this, the ordinances must not be administered, because all Christians at times feel this coldness. We should be humbled for it, but not discouraged. It is unpleasant to find a deadness in our spirits; but it should not stumble us. We should search into the reasons of it. Perhaps you have taken no pains with yourselves to get your souls into a warm frame, before you came to ordinances. Be not surprised then that the Spirit has withdrawn. Perhaps you were not so concerned as you ought, to keep a strict watch over your hearts in ordinances; or, perhaps, there is some sin you have been guilty of, which is not yet lamented over. God may therefore stand at a distance, and your souls be cold and lifeless. Inquire therefore into the reason of your coldness, and endeavour to get it removed, but be not discouraged. This person particularly complains, that, *if he is more lifeless at one time than another, it is at the Lord's supper; therefore imagines he should sin less in neglecting, than in attending it.* This is no natural consequence. It may be your duty to attend at the Lord's table; yet in some circumstances you may be out of the way of duty. Perhaps you may have placed too much dependence upon the ordinance, and thought that there you must be always comfortable and lively. God has therefore disappointed your expectations, that you may be taught not to lay such a stress upon ordinances. You have perhaps depended

too much upon your preparations, or else you have rushed too boldly upon the ordinance. Or, perhaps God may, for the trial of your faith and patience, withdraw his special presence from you, to humble you, and to lead you to a greater dependence upon Jesus Christ.

If you desire to wait upon Christ with spiritual views, and in a spiritual frame; if you are watchful over your heart, and labour after a quickening view of the love of Jesus, and a true sense of the nature and design of the ordinance; go on waiting upon him. In time he may give you his comforting presence. Remember, you are not singular in your complaints; and you may receive real advantage from an ordinance, though you may not be in so desirable a frame as you could wish. Having given you these few hints for your encouragement and direction, I now proceed to consider the particular question here proposed:

II. *How may a person judge whether a promise or a threatening comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the soul?* The occasion of this question is as follows: this person found some of the promises of God's word brought with a peculiar sweetness and power upon his mind; and these were succeeded by awful threatenings, which appeared to come with equal force. Now it is of great importance to know whether these come from the Spirit of God, or from Satan; or which of these properly belongs to us, and points out our state, whether the promise or the threatening; that so we may not be deceiving ourselves on the one hand with false hopes, and yet that we may not give way to unbelief on the other, if we have encouragement to hope. Satan often transforms himself into an *angel of light*, as well as appears in the character of a *roaring lion*, and makes use both of scripture promises and threatenings to carry on his purposes. Thus then it is matter of importance to be able to distinguish when these come from Satan, and when from God. I shall therefore hint two or three things, which I hope will be sufficient to direct and guide us in this interesting affair. And,

1. *Let us inquire, how we may know whether a promise, or any comfortable portion of scripture, that is brought to our minds, comes from God, or from Satan.* And, to guide us in our determination of this, we should always consider the circumstances and state of our souls, at the time when the promise comes to us, and the immediate end and design, tendency and influence of it upon us.

1. *We should consider the circumstances we are in, when a*

promise or a comfortable portion of scripture comes to us. For instance—Are we living in the practice of known sins? Are we secretly or openly gratifying any particular lust? Are we living in the omission of evident appointed duties? If a promise comes to us *in such circumstances*, to encourage us with the hopes of heaven, we have reason to question its coming from God; because we cannot suppose he will manifest himself unto any, who are walking in evident disobedience to his commands. Is a Christian under the power of any particular corruption? Is he sleepy, dead, and careless? He has reason to question whether a comforting promise comes from God, if any such comes before his mind, unless he has been humbled for his backslidings, and has fled to the blood of Jesus for pardon. God has always chastised his people, and frowned upon them, when running astray from him, Ps. lxxxix. 30—33. Therefore David himself was sorely distressed, after he had been guilty of adultery and murder. All Antinomian principles and practices are justly detestable in the sight of God; and so they ought to be in ours. Will God comfort a creature that is wallowing in all the mire of sin? No: if you are a lover of sin, you have no promise from God to support you; and whatever of that kind comes before you, is brought by Satan, who endeavours to entertain the hypocrite with the pleasing hopes of heaven, and so to lead him into a dangerous security. Examine then your circumstances. How is it with you when a promise comes? Has your case been represented as above? Then your circumstances are awful and melancholy indeed! But, if your souls are in darkness, mourning and longing after an absent Lord; if you are hungering and thirsting after righteousness; if you are seeking after a sense of the love of God, walking humbly with him, and pressing towards greater degrees of holiness; in this case, when any promise is brought to your mind with any degree of power, you may conclude that it comes from the Spirit of God.*

2. *We should inquire into the immediate end and tendency*

* I may here add one way, by which we may know whether we have an interest in the promise: we find in the word of God. We may generally observe something in a promise, that is descriptive of the persons who have an interest in it. Thus, that glorious promise in Isa. xli. 10, *Fear not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.* This promise is evidently made to those, that *fear that God is not with them*, and are *dismayed lest God should not be their God*. Those then, that are in these circumstances, have an interest in this promise.—Thus we may find something in most other promises and comfortable passages of scripture, to direct us whether we have an interest in them or not.

of a promise brought to us, and its influence upon us. For example—If it lulls us to security, and gives us any hopes of eternal life, though we are careless and indolent; if it leads us to presumption, encourageth us to sin, and yet assures us of an interest in Jesus Christ; we may look upon it as coming from Satan, who is willing to give us all possible encouragement, provided it does not produce in us a hatred of sin, and a love to holiness. But if on the other hand, the promise, when it comes, melts our hard hearts, and fills us with admiration of the love and rich distinguishing grace of God; if it not only scatters our fears, and fills us with a joy, but makes us humble; if it endears a Saviour more to us, and tends to bring us into a greater conformity to God; if, in fine, it leads us into a more evangelical frame, even that frame that honours God, and is suited to the scheme of salvation in the gospel; we may then conclude that it comes from God, and not from the enemy. A promise, having such an influence upon the soul, answers all the ends for which it is revealed. Now we cannot suppose that Satan would bring a promise to answer these important purposes: this would be acting against himself, and destroying his own kingdom; for the more humble we are, the more Christ is endeared to us, and the less is Satan's influence upon us.—Thus then we have reason to conclude that a promise in these circumstances comes from God.

II. *Let us now consider threatenings, and awful passages of Scripture.*—As there is a variety of these in the word of God, and they are designed for usefulness, yet are often made use of to answer other purposes; so it is of importance to us to know when these come to us from the Spirit of God, and when from the enemy. Now we may take the same method in judging of these, as we did in judging of promises, viz. consider the circumstances we are in, view the end and design of threatenings, when they come, and then examine their influence upon us. Thus, if threatenings, or awful passages of scripture, come with a design to rob us of our spiritual comfort, to stagger our faith, and bring us into despair, we may conclude they come from Satan, and not from God.—But if we are slothful and secure; if we have been running into sin, omitting known duties, and are not yet awake; if the means that have been used, have not been made effectual to revive us, and these threatenings or awful passages seem brought to our minds with a design to rouse us, and to stir us up to greater diligence in our Christian course; if, in fine, they have this influence upon us, we may conclude they come from God;

for these are the purposes they are designed to answer. We have a variety of passions to work upon. Promises, endearing representations of the love of Christ, &c. are designed to touch the finer springs of human nature, to move the softer passions. Threatenings, and awful representations of hell, &c. are designed to alarm us, to compel, and, as it were, drive us. Thus God makes use of various arguments to begin and carry on his work in us. This use then we should make of the more awful parts of scripture. A view of them should make us admire that grace, that has *plucked us as brands out of everlasting burnings*; fill us with a godly jealousy over our hearts; make us seriously inquire whether we are Christians indeed, and stir us up to press forward, with growing cheerfulness, *towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. When threatenings appear to be brought with this view, and when they have this influence upon us, they are as means in the hands of God for our good. But, when they forbid our hopes, and draw us to despair, we may conclude there is the hand of Satan in it. Upon the whole, so far as threatenings promote our greater holiness and spiritual advantage, so far they are useful, and answer their end; but so far as they weaken our hands, discourage our souls, and lead us from God, so far they are made use of by the enemy of souls to our spiritual hurt.—Thus then inquire, you who have had promises, or threatenings, or both, come upon your minds with any degree of force, inquire what circumstances you were in, what the direct tendency of these promises or threatenings was, and what influence they had upon you; and from hence you may in some measure determine whether they came from God, or from the enemy. I shall now conclude with one remark, viz.

How glorious is Heaven, and how happy the believer there! Here we are fluctuating between hope and fear; we often hang our harp upon the willows; we are watering our couch with tears, and are exposed to the fury of the roaring lion. O happy alteration, when we reach the mansions above, to find all sin perfectly destroyed, every fear scattered! no longer to know what it is to be in darkness, or what the least degree of coldness means! Desirable state! to be present with the Lord, and to find his presence animating our souls with the noblest ardour in his service! to have the whole conduct of Providence laid before us, and every mystery sweetly unravelled! to look back upon the many instances of divine wisdom and grace in our salvation! to find ourselves got safe over Jordan, and

appearing in all the glory of the children of God, and triumphing as kings and priests! Blessed world, "Hail, happy day! When will it be thus with me? Come, thou important period, when this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved! Haste, that joyful moment, when I shall at once be delivered from all my sins, and all my sorrows; when I shall no more stand in need of promises or threatenings, the one to comfort, the other to quicken me; having the glorious uninterrupted view of my exalted Mediator, and the sweetest, fullest manifestations of his love, to keep the sacred fire ever burning in me, to fill me with joy unspeakable, and to engage my unwearied and everlasting praises!" Thus may we long and breathe after the heavenly state, and in God's own time make the glorious change. Amen.

CASE V.

How far may a Person judge of the strength or weakness of his faith by the brightness or darkness of his frames?

THE growth of grace in the heart of a true believer is a very mysterious thing; and there is scarcely any particular whereby Christians in general are more puzzled, and wherein they are more frequently mistaken, than in judging of the strength or weakness of their graces. It is very common for those to judge themselves *declining* in spiritual experience, who are really growing apace in the divine life; and for those to esteem themselves *improving*, who are in reality decaying and withering. I cannot but apprehend that the foundation of these mistakes lies in their not properly distinguishing between *faith* and *frames*. We are apt to judge of the former by the latter; accounting our faith and other graces to be strong, when our frames are comfortable and lively; and thinking that faith must certainly be weak, when these our frames are very dark and distressing. But, were this rule just and valid, there would be no manner of difficulty in measuring the degree of grace in us; because no believer can be at a loss to know whether he is in a comfortable or uncomfortable frame. But that this is an improper standard to measure the degrees of

grace by, is very evident; because nothing is more variable than our frames, as they are continually waxing and waning alternately. In this respect we are scarce a day at a stand; yea, an hour often makes a great alteration herein: whereas it cannot be supposed that grace itself is so very changeable; for *the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* Prov. iv. 18.

This case is taken under consideration, in consequence of two distinct letters transmitted to me: the one, regarding comfortable frames; and the other, uncomfortable ones. These two letters contain several experimental queries, and difficulties, all of which centre in, and may be solved by a proper answer to, the single question above specified. The letters themselves you will find hereafter inserted in their proper places, where a distinct answer is given to them.

Be pleased therefore to attend seriously to the following observations relating to faith and frames:

1. *A strong faith tends to produce and promote a bright and comfortable frame.* This must be granted from the nature of saving faith, and from the express declarations of the divine word. Nothing tends more to take away our doubts, to clear up our evidences, and to comfort our hearts, than the strong and lively exercises of a living faith in the Lord Jesus, as a free and complete Saviour. Faith is often set, in opposition to distressing fears. *I will trust,* says the church, *and not be afraid,* Isa. xii. 2. We read likewise of the *joy of faith*, and the *assurance of faith*; of being *filled with all joy and peace in believing*, and of *rejoicing by faith in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory*, 1 Pet. i. 8. These scripture phrases sufficiently testify, that there is no better way of having our evidences clear, and our comforts strong, than by exercising our faith, trust, and dependence, upon a free and glorious Saviour. If then we would be truly comfortable, let us desire and endeavour to live by faith on Christ, and aim at direct acts of recumbency on him; for the more we can, by the realizing and appropriating acts of faith, see of the freeness and fulness of divine grace in Christ, the more experience we shall have of evangelical supports and consolations. On the contrary, we must observe, that

2. *The weakness of faith tends to promote and produce dark and uncomfortable frames.* For since fear and faith are set in direct opposition to each other, therefore as faith declines, so in proportion fears prevail. The declining of faith in its strength and activity, gives way for our corruptions to work,

for temptations to assault and overpower us, for distressing fears to arise; and then, the light of God's countenance withdraws, and our evidences for heaven are darkened and clouded. As soon as ever we begin to distrust the power of Christ, the faithfulness of the promises, or the absolute freeness of grace, we are sinking. Thus Peter, when walking upon the water at Christ's command, and in Christ's strength, is upheld as if walking upon firm ground, so long as his faith in Christ's power and kindness is maintained; but no sooner does he attend to the boisterousness of the wind, and withdraw his dependence from Christ, but he begins to sink, his heart to sink within him, and his body to sink in the waves. And mark what a tender and instructive rebuke Christ gives him upon that occasion, Matt. xiv. 31. *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?* Much doubting argues little faith. Nothing can be more prejudicial both to our comfort and holiness, than to suspect the almighty power and free grace of Christ.

These two observations being made and proved, some may be ready to imagine, it necessarily follows, that we are to judge of the strength or weakness of our faith, in all cases, by the brightness or darkness of our frames. And the conclusion would be just, were it not for the two following observations. For notwithstanding all that has been said or allowed, yet,

3. *A believer may be in a dark and uncomfortable frame, and yet be strong in faith; and that not only in the grace of faith, but in its exercise too.* I acknowledge that this at first view may seem mysterious, and contradictory to what has been declared. And it is this one thing which perplexes and stumbles our friend, who wrote one of the letters, when he asks, "Are not light and peace the peculiar privileges and effects of faith?" This consideration, my friend, is perplexing not to *you* only, but to many others. Let me therefore attempt to show you, in a plain and evident manner, how this case really stands. *Are light and peace the peculiar effects of faith?* I answer, yes; but not in such a way as supposes that all our distress and darkness must arise from the *want* or *weakness* of faith. A few scriptural instances will make this appear abundantly evident. What think you of the condition of the church, as expressed in Micah vii. 8? The church was at that time in great darkness, and under heavy complaints, and yet was strong, very strong, in faith; as appears by the language there used. *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.*

Again, was not Job in a very dark frame, and under great agony of spirit, when he says, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him?* Job xiii. 15.

And what shall we say concerning the poor woman of Canaan, mentioned Matt. xv. 21—28. who renewed her petition, and would not be driven away by the seeming repulses she met with from the Lord Jesus? Was not her agony great, her soul in deep distress, when she heard our Lord say, *It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs?* But it is indubitably clear that her faith was real; yea, that it was very strong, vehement, and skilful in its exercise, under this distress, when she replied, *Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.* Such instances, which I have here adduced, are frequently brought as proofs of real faith, though attended with weakness, doubts, and fears. But in reality these are specimens of faith in its *strongest* efforts and acts.

You may therefore well ask, How can these things be? If the strength of faith tends to a bright frame, and the weakness of faith to a dark frame, how is it possible that faith should be so lively and strong, and yet the experience of the soul so distressed and complaining? I shall endeavour to explain this paradox by a familiar simile. Compare spiritual things with natural; and let the strength of faith be represented by bodily strength. A person may be very strong in his body, yea, and exercise that strength to the utmost, when under a very heavy burden, and not be so easy or comfortable in himself as one who has not half his strength, and has no burden, or but a light one, to carry. We are not to judge a person to be weak, merely because he faints, and pants, and labours; nor to judge a person to be strong, merely because he seems lively and active. We must consider the burden a person has to bear, or the difficulties he has to encounter with, in order to pass a right judgment upon his ability. Now apply this to the case similar to it in spiritual affairs: If a person strong in faith is tried, has many great duties to perform, or many and heavy trials to struggle with, or many weighty burdens upon him; these things may so put his strong faith to a stand or difficulty, as to make him ready to sink and fail. They may take away or suppress all the sensible pleasure and joy of faith, and may make him complain as under distress and darkness. Thus you see faith may be very strong, and very strong in its exercise too, and yet yield no sensible pleasure or exultation, by reason of the great things it has to conflict with and fight against.

These thoughts may likewise help our conceptions in the last observation, which is, that,

4. *A person may be very weak in faith, and yet his frames be bright and comfortable.* This is a case not at all uncommon among Christians. Observe the newly-converted person, who is just brought out of darkness into light, has the principle of grace newly implanted: we cannot suppose that such a one in common is strong in faith, when the seed is but just sown in his heart, or but just sprung up. And yet we find this new-born babe in Christ is frequently favoured with peculiar joys and consolations. And it is very clear, that this newly-regenerate person has not his faith as yet strengthened or established, notwithstanding all his exultations and spiritual delights; for, if there be but a little withdrawalment of the light of God's countenance, or if he be but assaulted by but a small temptation, we find his faith appears then to be exceeding weak or unskilful, not able to stand the shock of the temptation, or not sufficiently skilful to expound the meaning of the spiritual withdrawalment. A very little change in experience often stumbles the faith, shakes the hope, and discourages the heart of him who is newly convinced and comforted. This surely is an infallible indication that his faith is weak, although he may be favoured with much spiritual sweetness and delight. A little child may as well imagine that he is a strong man, because he is dandled upon his father's knees, and enjoys his father's smiles, as a newly-converted person conclude his case is firm, because his spiritual comforts are enlarged. Neither should we confine this remark to the new-born babe in Christ; because there are many, who have had some standing in the grace of Christ, and yet remain very weak in knowledge, and very feeble in their faith: and these we find are sometimes favoured with great spiritual enjoyments. Their corruptions are suppressed, their evidences clear, by the Spirit shining upon his own work; and for that reason they cannot but be comfortable and joyful in their frames for a season. Now their souls are saying, *My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved.* Yet, no sooner does God hide his face, or permit a corruption to arise, but their souls are affrighted, and their hearts discouraged. This is a plain token that their faith is really weak, at the very time when their comforts are strong. And thus it comes to pass, that those who are weak in faith, are sometimes the most comfortable; and those who are strong in faith, often have less of the spiritual enjoyments.

These things being premised, we may from thence gather

a true answer to the questions proposed in the two letters that occasioned this discourse, which may be thus disposed.

1. *How shall we know whether the darkness of our frames arises from the weakness of our faith?* This query in substance seems to be aimed at in one of the letters, which runs thus :

“ SIR,

“ I AM one, who through rich grace, have been taught to know and feel myself a sinner, and have been favoured with a clear manifestation of the love of God in Christ Jesus by the teachings and witnessings of the Spirit: but yet I do sometimes walk in darkness. May I humbly beg leave to propose the following questions to you: What is the cause of this darkness? Does it not proceed from corruptions within, from temptations from without, or from the omission of duty, or the commission of sin? How may I be able to judge of the cause, when under a dark experience and clouded evidences, so that I cannot see him whom my soul loveth? Are not light and peace the peculiar privileges and effects of faith? O Sir, I am often apt to distress my soul, lest I have sinned, and caused the Lord to hide away his face from me!”

In answer to these affecting queries, I must say,

If you, my friend, are conscious to yourself of the commission of any particular sin, or of the omission of any particular known duty, this consciousness will certainly enfeeble your confidence in God, and will cause you to walk in darkness and distress; and you can never arrive at true comfort again until you have been enabled frankly to confess your sin with humble shame and self-abhorrence, and to make a fresh application for, and a fresh application of, the atoning blood of Christ by a living faith. Witness the holy Psalmist in Ps. xxxii. 3, 4, 5.

While he kept silence, and would not, through shame, or fear, or pride, ingenuously own before the Lord his guilt and sin, his distress increased, and he could gain no ease or relief; but when his heart was opened, and he said, *I will confess my transgression to the Lord*, then he received a sweet sense of free pardon.

Contracted guilt is a very sufficient cause of darkness; and you can expect no other, but that God should frown upon your soul, or hide his face from you, and leave you to sorrow and anguish of spirit. Your conscience should therefore seriously inquire into this matter; and if, upon inquiry, it be

found that something done or neglected lies at the bottom of the spiritual complaint, you can receive no true consolation, until you have, with humble shame, and by a humble faith, cast your burden upon the Lord. And let me entreat you to beware of any consolation that does not come in at this door.

With regard to corruptions from within, or temptations from without, these likewise may be the cause of the darkness in your frames, and cast a cloud over your evidences. But in this case, it does not presently follow that your faith is weak. If these corruptions be unallowed and lamented, and these temptations opposed and resisted, there may be great grace and strong faith exercised in these circumstances. It is true, that such corruptions and temptations will necessarily rob you of your comfort, and hinder you of a free and delightful enjoyment of God, so long as they are permitted to assault and perplex you: but if these disagreeable trials and experiences do not sink you into discouragement, and do only quicken and excite you to fight against the temptations, and to mortify the corruptions, in the strength of Christ; your faith is strong, though your soul is disquieted. While faith is acting under these disadvantages, it is incapable of filling you with joy and consolation, until it has gained some conquest over these enemies of your peace; but yet it may be vigorous in its exercise to withstand these temptations, and to plead the promises for deliverance from the power of these rising corruptions.

By the foregoing thoughts you may judge, whether the darkness of your frames arises from the weakness of your faith, or no. If under these complaints your heart sinks, your spirits are discouraged, so that you are ready to lay down the weapons of opposition, and to quit the field of battle; this is a sign that faith is weak. But if, when a veil is cast over your evidences, you are enabled to exercise direct acts of reliance and recumbency upon Christ; if, when corruption arises, or temptation assaults, you are not sunk, but only humbled hereby, and quickened to fly to Christ for strength to mortify sin and overcome temptation, and are determined still to fight and pray, to pray and fight, against these spiritual enemies; then the darkness of your soul does not arise from the weakness of your faith, but should be looked upon as only a trial and proof of its strength.

2. *How shall we know whether the brightness of our frames arises from the strength of our faith?* Some believers have little or no notion of any comfort or spiritual satisfaction, but what arises from reflection or self-examination; and therefore

bend their whole course this way, in order to attain bright frames and comfortable evidences; and are ready to look upon the satisfaction they obtain in this manner as the assurance of faith, and as almost the only proof of the strength of this excellent grace: while others are for paying such a regard to the comfort arising from direct acts of faith upon Christ, that they are tempted to despise or neglect the great duty of self-examination. But it is highly necessary to keep a proper medium between these two extremes, in order to know whether the degree of our consolation and satisfaction proceeds from the growth and exercise of this noble principle.

It will be proper to introduce in this place the substance of the other letter; which runs to this effect:

“ SIR,

“ I HAVE for many years past made it my constant practice to set apart a serious hour for self-examination; and as the word of God is the only unerring rule, whereby to judge of spiritual thought, I have (after earnest prayer for the assistance of the blessed Spirit) taken some text of scripture; such as that, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* In prosecuting the solemn inquiry, I have endeavoured to find out the account of faith, its fruits and effects, as described in the word of God. The effect of this practice as to my comfort has been various, as I could more or less discover the Spirit’s work on my heart. Now, Sir, the question I would humbly propose is this: Whether a believer may not warrantably take comfort from the Spirit’s work on his heart, as an evidence of his interest in Christ?”

THIS serious letter describes a practice, that I would earnestly recommend to all those who are desirous to go safely and comfortably in the way to heaven. And as for the question here proposed, I would answer without the least hesitation, that a believer may and ought, upon serious examination and prayer, to take comfort from, be thankful for, and rejoice in, every evidence of true grace, as so many seals of the Spirit, whereby the believer is sealed up until the day of redemption. But then remember, that the comforts arising from hence are *of themselves* no evidence of the growth or strength of faith: for, if a believer receives the *whole* of his comfort from the satisfaction he gathers this way, it is a proof that his faith is really very weak; yea, and the comfort itself will prove very wavering and uncertain. This our friend justly acknowledges

in his letter, when he says, that the effect of his practice has been very *various* as to comfort: and no wonder: for, if a person builds his hopes upon his evidences, they will be found a very uncertain basis; these evidences being sometimes clear, and sometimes cloudy and dark. But, blessed be God! these are not the ground of our hope; for that does not consist in any thing wrought in us, but in the absolute freeness of grace in Christ, for any poor distressed soul to lay hold of, fly to, and rest upon. This freeness of grace is an everlasting and stable foundation, which does not change with our frames. And I am verily persuaded, that many believers are so much attached to comfort drawn from evidences (as if it were the only comfort,) that they have very much lost the strength and skill of faith. For the business of faith is, not to live and depend upon a work of grace in us, but humbly and confidently to refer ourselves unto the free and powerful grace of God without us, under a real sight and conviction of our own weakness, emptiness, pollution, guilt, and unworthiness.

But, if you would know whether the comforts you obtain by self-examination are attended with the growth and vigour of faith, it is needful you should inquire into the nature and kind of them. Perhaps it may be only a *cold speculative satisfaction*. You by the exercise of reason compare your experience with the word of God, and so coldly draw the important conclusion, but feel no endearing, enlivening, sanctifying effect from it. If this be all, here is nothing of the work of faith or the exercise of grace in it. Nay, it is possible for the comfort obtained this way to be of a *soul-stupifying nature*. When you have drawn this conclusion, it is used only to still the anxieties and relieve the distresses of the soul, to make you the more contented under the prevalency of some corruption, under the consciousness of some guilt, or under the power of a carnal frame. If this be the tendency of the satisfaction you gain by examination, it is a sad sort of comfort indeed! And, let the inference be drawn with ever so much justness or clearness, yet it proves the soul to be in a dangerous and declining frame.

Once more: A believer, in performing the duty of self-examination, ought to take special care about *the ends* he has in it. What is it that you aim at, in searching after evidences of grace within you? Is it to obtain an assurance that your state is safe, that you might silence the clamours of a guilty conscience, or that you might remove that uneasiness which your mind feels, because of the power of corruption or carnal

security; to sooth your mind with this thought, that all is well, because you have a secure interest in Christ and the covenant? If this be your aim and desire, give me the freedom to say, that this is to continue in sin, because grace abounds. And therefore evidences thus obtained and thus employed, are exceedingly dangerous, and very suspicious.

But, if you seek after, and improve the evidences of a work of grace in your soul, to help you forward in farther actings of faith upon Christ, to encourage you to be more frequent, fervent, and confident in your application to Christ for fresh supplies of soul-sanctifying, sin-subduing, and heart-strengthening grace; then your comfort is of the right kind, and the brightness of your frame proves the strength of your faith. Upon the whole we may gather,

3. *How we may know whether our faith be strong or weak, let our frames be what they will.*—It is not our being in a dark frame, but our being discouraged by it to lay down our weapons against sin and Satan in a kind of despairing way, that proves the weakness of our faith. It is not our being in a bright frame, but our being thereby quickened and encouraged to fly to Christ, and trust in him for further grace and strength, that proves the strength of our faith. If our frames are dark, gloomy, and distressing; and these distresses quicken our desires after saving grace, and we are excited to earnest prayers and fiducial pleadings for the blessings of grace, and to fight against sin and temptation in the strength of Christ; this proves that our faith is strong, though our comforts may be very low, and our sorrows very great. If our frames are bright and delightful, and our souls take all our comfort from what we feel, and we begin to trust in, or rest satisfied with, grace received; this proves that our faith is weak and unskilful, though our comforts are strong, and our evidences clear to ourselves.

I shall conclude the whole with the following very brief and compendious advice to believers concerning their frames.

Are your frames comfortable?

You may make them the matter of your *praise*, but not of your *pride*.

You may make them your *pleasure*, but not your *portion*.

You may make them the matter of your *encouragement*, but not the ground of your *security*.

Are your frames dark and uncomfortable?

They should *humble* you, but not *discourage* you.

They should *quicken* you, and not *obstruct* you, in your application for necessary and suitable grace.

They should make you see your own *emptiness*, but not make you suspect the *fulness* of Christ.

They should make you see your own *unworthiness*, but not make you suspect the *willingness* of Christ.

They should make you see your own *weakness*, but not cause you to suspect the *strength* of Christ.

They should make you suspect your *own hearts*, but not the firmness and freeness of the *promises*.

CASE VI.

Whether a Person, who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost; and whether he may partake of the ordinances of God?

[This question is supported by the following letter:]

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I TAKE this opportunity to inquire your judgment on the state of my soul, which is as follows: I am a young person, who have had a religious education; but alas, I soon followed the base inclinations of my own heart, and stuck at nothing, let it be ever so vile, till it pleased God, by conversation with a good man upon the evil nature of sin, to fasten deep convictions upon my mind. Then, what terrors, torture, and anguish did I feel! How was my mind filled with horrid blasphemies! So that I concluded I was given up to a reprobate mind, and that there was no place for repentance, if I sought it ever so carefully with tears. In this awful condition I continued eighteen months, when it pleased God to magnify the riches of his grace to the very chief of all sinners, in sending the glorious Comforter to set my soul at liberty, and make me rejoice with unspeakable joy. But notwithstanding this, when I look back, and consider my great vileness, I am ready to dispute its being a reality. Therefore I have sent you the above question, to which may the Lord enable you to give a comfortable and speedy answer.”

THIS is a case that we frequently meet with; a case that deserves our serious consideration, as it may tend to encourage

many distressed sinners in a proper application to Jesus Christ, for salvation, and give them the most admiring and animating views of the riches of divine grace manifested therein. In hopes that these ends may be in some measure answered, I would consider these two things :

I. *Whether a person who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost?*

—And,

II. *Whether he may partake of all the ordinances of God?*

I. *I am to show whether a person who has been a great sinner, has any ground to expect pardon and the comforts of the Holy Ghost.* If he continues hardened, and is obstinately determined to live in the gratification of any criminal lust and passion, he has no reason to expect either pardon or the consolations of the Holy Ghost. But, if under a conviction of sin, he applies to the Mediator; is willing to receive him, and submit to him in all his characters, (which I apprehend is the case with this person,) then we may readily answer this question in the affirmative, and support it by the following considerations :

1. *It is perfectly consistent with the grace and mercy of God, that he should pardon the greatest sinners, and visit them too (if he pleases) with the consolations of his Spirit; therefore there is ground of hope.* The grace of God is absolutely free in the salvation of his people. When he chose them from eternity, he viewed them in the character of rebels unworthy therefore of his favour, and deserving his everlasting wrath; and when he comes to them in time, to apply salvation, he finds them dead in trespasses and sins. *Free grace* laid the foundation; and *free grace* will finish the spiritual building, and lay the *top-stone* thereof. When our Lord inquires of his Father, wherefore he had *revealed* the mysteries of his kingdom to such *babes* as his disciples, and had *hid them from the wise and prudent*, he says, *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*, Matt. xi. 25. resolving it all into the free sovereign pleasure of God. If then God is absolutely free in our salvation, and does not refuse the blessings of it in consideration of the least demerit or unworthiness in us, then he may as well pardon the greatest sinners, as those who have not run into such excess of riot; especially if we consider that God exalts the riches of his grace in our salvation;* nay, that this is the great end he has in view in the whole of our

* Isa. lv. 17. Rom. v. 17.

salvation. None should now be discouraged at a view of the greatness of their sins, or question the reality of those spiritual enjoyments God has given them, because they are unworthy of them. The riches of the grace of God infinitely exceed all the demerit of sin, and triumph in the full pardon of the most heinous transgressions. Methinks, I see the awakened sinner impressed with a deep sense of his vileness, and hear him objecting to his pardon, his great unworthiness. But, O my soul! are you indeed exceeding vile? Are your sins exceeding numerous, and attended with every aggravation? Are you the unworthiest of creatures? The more exceeding abundant then will the grace of God appear in your pardon, comfort, and salvation; the more will the great end he has in view in the salvation of sinners be answered, and the more glory redound to him. Under a view of this infinite, abundant grace, you may sweetly encourage yourself, and say—"It is true, Lord, I am unworthy; nay, I would call myself the unworthiest of thy creatures. But, Oh! I would not, I even dare not distrust, and say, I am too great a sinner for a God of so much grace to pardon. Would not this, Lord, lessen the riches of thy mercy? Oh! if I am the greatest sinner thou hast ever yet saved, I shall then be the wonder of heaven; I shall claim a right above all my fellow-saints to adore the riches of thy grace; and thou, Lord, wilt be admired of all, for thy mercy manifested to a creature so unworthy."

2. *It is consistent with the glory of all the divine perfections to pardon and comfort the greatest sinners; therefore such have ground for hope.*—If any thing appears to forbid it, it is the justice, the holiness of God, &c. the necessity of inflicting punishment upon the offender to secure the moral government of God from any stain or abuse. Had there been no Mediator, no surety to stand in the sinner's stead, to make satisfaction, and purchase spiritual and eternal blessings; these would have stood as everlasting obstructions to the pardon and salvation of the sinner. But, as there is a Mediator provided; as this Mediator is God and man; as he has in our nature obeyed the law, and borne the punishment sin deserved; as the sacrifice he offered had an infinite virtue in it, and so was accepted; so there is a way open for the bestowment of every saving blessing, is a perfect consistency with the honour of the law and the Lawgiver, upon the sinner, nay upon the greatest sinner: for the virtue of this infinitely atoning sacrifice exceeds the utmost malignity and demerit of sin. What glorious encouraging news should this be to every guilty creature! *Behold mercy*

and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other, all being perfectly harmonious in the salvation of the most unworthy! See justice laying aside its awful sword, and joining with grace and mercy in holding out the golden sceptre! See the law receiving the highest honour by the obedience of the Lawgiver! See all the demands of *every* attribute of the Deity fully answered in Christ's mediation, the glory of each secured, and yet encouragement given to the vilest sinners to hope and seek for salvation! Behold, *God is just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus!* Rom. iii. 26. *He is faithful and just in the forgiveness of sins, and in cleansing from all unrighteousness.* 1 John i. 9. And can you now despair of salvation, or say, God cannot or will not visit you with the consolations of his Spirit? Have you ever considered the sacrifice that has been offered, its appointment by the father, its atoning virtue, its perfect acceptableness? And can you say, your sins are too great to be forgiven? Have you applied, my dear, but doubting friend, to Christ, as a suitable, all-sufficient Saviour, and been enabled to commit your soul without reserve into his hands, to be justified, sanctified, and eternally saved? Let me then tell you, God can be even just in pardoning your sins, though never so great; and in comforting and saving your soul, though never so unworthy. When we look upon our unworthiness abstractedly from Christ, we are filled with sad confusion; but, when we look to Jesus the Mediator, our fears are scattered, and our souls revived with the hopes of a glorious immortality. You do not question the virtue of the blood of Jesus, sure! *His blood cleanseth from all sin,* 1 John i. 7. God, considered absolutely in himself, would appear as a *consuming fire* to us, in our guilty condition; his justice and his truth would make us tremble. But view him through this Mediator, and you see his wrath appeased, his countenance wearing a glorious smile: you see his justice and truth too on your side, speaking even peace to your troubled conscience, and securing your pardon and salvation. O ye sensible and awakened sinners, look upon a crucified Redeemer! View his bloody agony in the garden! See the *mighty God* hanging upon the cross! And then rejoice and say, "Oh, there is hope for us! We will not give up our souls as lost, so long as the blood of Christ has an *infinite* virtue in it. We will humbly hope that God will pardon such sinners as we are, though we deserve the lowest hell, and wash our polluted souls in that overflowing fountain, that is set open for sin and uncleanness."

3. *If we ever find any sense of sin, any humiliation for it, and any desires after salvation, in the way God has determined to bestow it, we may conclude that there is pardon and salvation for us.* Some persons are afraid they have committed the *unpardonable sin*. Satan makes this awful suggestion to their minds; and they go under the distressing apprehensions of it from day to day, and are ready to think all ground of hope is gone. But, whatever the unpardonable sin is; without inquiring into its nature, we may, without hesitation, conclude, that we have not been guilty of it, if we find any humbling sense of sin, any relentings for it, any desires after salvation, and any willingness to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, as he is represented in the gospel.—For, here I would ask—How came you to have an humbling sense of sin? Whence are these desires after salvation? Whence this subjection of soul to Jesus Christ? Is not all this from the Spirit of God? A view of the threatening law may terrify and alarm us; but it is the peculiar work of the Spirit of God, bringing home the gospel to our hearts, that fills our souls with self-loathing, and draws out our hearts in holy longings after communion with, and a conformity to Christ. And wherefore does the Spirit of God do this? Is it not a plain intimation that we have not sinned the unpardonable sin? Is it not an encouragement to us to hope that there is salvation for us? Is it not a token for good, that God will give us the blessings we are desirous of enjoying? Some convictions there may be, and often are in those that perish. But would God show us the odiousness of sin; would he humble us for it, and fill us with desires after a deliverance from it; would he show us the excellency of Jesus Christ, and make us willing to receive him in all his characters; and then leave us to perish! Oh! No. You have his promise, Matt. v. 6. to plead, ye thirsty sinners. You have Christ's own words, John vii. 37. to encourage you, ye willing souls. If you are willing, Christ is so too. Inquire then, has Christ your will? Do you see a beauty in him, and is your soul drawn in affection to him? This is an assurance that he will pardon and save you, and give you all these consolations by the way, that he sees to be needful for you. The greatness of your sins will be no objection to him.

4. *God has pardoned, comforted, and saved great sinners.*—As God has graciously represented himself as a God *pardoning iniquity, transgressions, and sins*, that is, all sorts of sins; so he has done it in all ages and generations. Let us look into the Old Testament, and we shall find it furnishing us with

many instances. Thus Lot was guilty of *drunkenness*, and *incest*, Gen. xix. 33, &c. David was chargeable with *adultery* and *murder*, 2 Sam. xi. 4, &c. and he was pardoned and comforted too. Solomon fell into *idolatry*. Manasseh was guilty of such abominations as even exceeded those amongst the heathens; yet he is made a monument of mercy, 2 Chron. 33. And we have a most striking and remarkable instance of rich distinguishing grace in Ephraim. Isa. lvii. 17, 18: *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth; and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.* What could we expect to hear an offended God saying but this, Let him alone to receive the fruit of his doing? Shall I manifest my grace to such an obstinate rebel? He might have spoke in such awful language as this. But behold the might of God, how astonishing! *I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and will restore comforts to him and to his mourners.* The timorous soul may say, these are instances under a dark dispensation, and therefore come not up to the case. Let us therefore now look into the New Testament. And here, the first instance that strikes us is Peter's denying his Lord, and with dreadful oaths and imprecations, Matt. xxvi. 72, &c. Another instance we have in Saul the Pharisee, who was a fiery persecutor, a bold blasphemer; and yet he not only obtained pardoning mercy, but enjoyed much of the consolations of the Holy Ghost; and he says of his conversion, that it was a pattern of what Christ would do in afterages; that is, that he would pardon and save the greatest sinners, 1 Tim. i. 16. But we have all sorts of sinners mentioned amongst the sanctified Corinthians, 1 Cor. vi. 11. *Such were some of you; that is, some were fornicators; others idolaters; others adulterers; others effeminate, or of lascivious tempers and practices; others abusers of themselves with mankind, or such as have been guilty of the detestable sin of Sodom; others thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners:* But you are now the triumph of rich and sovereign grace, being *justified*, and in some measure *sanctified* too. Thus we see that all sorts of sins, even the most unnatural, have been pardoned. And can you now say, my friend, that yours are too great to be forgiven, or that God would not comfort such an unworthy creature as you are? Are there many peculiar aggravations attending your sins? Were they committed after great mercies and deliverances? So were Lot's and Solomon's. Have they been committed with great deliberation? So were David's. Have they been often repeated? Peter repeated his

three times. In fine, all these instances show, that God can consistently pardon, nay, that he does pardon the greatest of sinners, and favour them too with the consolations of his spirit. Sometimes indeed great sinners have felt great terrors; but these have been often sweetly succeeded by great joys. In the life of Colonel Gardiner, we read of the sore and long distress he was under; but God was pleased, after some time, to scatter the cloud, to change the scene, and to turn his bitter cries into cheerful praises. Thus we should not be discouraged at the greatness of our sins.

5. *That we may know whether those consolations, with which we have been favoured, are the consolations of the Spirit, we must inquire what influence they had upon us.* You see God can, in a perfect consistency with all his perfections, bestow the blessings of salvation upon the unworthiest of his creatures. That you may be more particularly satisfied about yourself, that those consolations you have enjoyed came from God, look back to the frame of mind you was then in, and inquire what influence they had upon you. If the joys you felt made you careless, and left in you a greater relish for sin; if you can with greater ease pursue the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life; then you have reason to conclude that all was a delusion. But if you was humbly seeking after salvation, when your soul was thus set at liberty; if the joys you felt made sin appear odious, endeared the Redeemer more; if you was more weaned from the world, filled with admiration at a view of distinguishing grace, and was put more upon prayer and other means towards promoting the power and life of religion in your heart; then you may conclude that God has been comforting your soul with those consolations with which he comforts his people; and consequently, that you have no reason to be discouraged at a view of the greatness of your sins, as if they were effectual obstructions to the manifestations of pardoning and saving grace.—Having thus endeavoured to answer the first question, I now proceed to the second :

II. *Whether one, who has been a great sinner, but has been enabled to apply to Jesus for salvation, may partake of all the ordinances of the Lord?* This is a question easy to be answered. If the greatness of our sins does not exclude us from pardoning mercy, it does not exclude us from the ordinances of God. If through grace we have an interest in, and a title to, the glories of an eternal world, then we may by the same grace claim a right to all the privileges of God's house here. If you was

not baptized in your infancy, it is certainly your duty now, that so you may publicly enlist yourself under the banner of the mighty God. As to the ordinance of the Lord's supper, if you have been humbled for sin, and desire to be delivered from it; if you have been enabled to give up yourself to Jesus; if you desire to love him more, and to grow in a conformity to his image, and would wait upon Christ in all his ordinances, that these ends may be answered; it is then your duty to come to the table of the Lord; and you may do it with a comfortable expectation of the blessing and presence of Christ to make the ordinance effectual to strengthen every grace of the Spirit in you, and to train you up more and more for the heavenly inheritance. You are not to consider the greatness of your sins, when you are inquiring whether it is your duty to wait upon Christ in this ordinance; but to consider the frame and temper of your mind, the ends you have in view, and the principles from whence you act. These are to determine your duty, and not your unworthiness. Permit me then to call you to an examination. You have been a great sinner; and have you been humbled upon this account? Are you filled with shame and self-abhorrence? Have you in the frame of the prodigal son thrown yourself before an offended God, saying with him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son? Oh, no! it is more, Lord, than I deserve, to be treated as a hired servant. I deserve to be banished for ever to the infernal regions; but, Lord, stretch out thine hand, pluck me as a brand out of the burning, take me into thy family, and let me not perish for ever. I am loathsome; but do thou *clothe me with change of raiment, that the shame of my nakedness do not appear*. I am unclean; but do thou wash me in that *fountain set open*. Lord, I would be thine! Adorable Mediator, I would love thee! Behold, here I give up myself entirely unto thee! But I am not indeed worthy of thine acceptance; for, Lord, thou must do all for me and in me. Yet, as I have thy promise, on that I lean for my encouragement."—Is not this your case, my friend? Have you been thus enabled to come to Jesus? You have then a right to all the ordinances of the Lord. Come humbly, under a sense of your unworthiness of the divine favour; yet come cheerfully, casting yourself upon the Lord, expecting that, in waiting upon him, he will fulfil his promises of grace in your complete and everlasting salvation.—Having thus answered these two questions, I would close with three reflections.

1. Hence we learn, *That, of all the works of God, those of our redemption and salvation by Jesus Christ, are the most glorious.* In the creation God has manifested his wisdom, power, and goodness; but here you see the manifold wisdom of God; here you see the riches of his grace. When we consider the character of those who are saved, what the blessings of salvation are, and the method which God took to secure these blessings, we cannot but be filled with the highest wonder. What heights, what depths of wisdom and love, that God will pardon and save rebels! that he has formed a plan for doing this in a consistency with his justice and holiness! "Whilst others are viewing the various phenomena of nature, O my soul, let me behold this mystery of divine grace! Let me see an *incarnate God*, and view the *King of Glory* stooping to take upon him the form of a servant, to obey and suffer in the room of guilty rebels! Let me see, in consequence of this, grace displaying itself in the salvation of sinners, conquering hard hearts, pardoning the greatest transgressions, plucking brands out of the burning, and raising the vilest creatures from a state of dishonour, distress, and misery, to be kings and priests unto God!"—Oh, what entertainment, what pleasure must this give to a rational mind! It is the song of the saints above, the admiration of creatures arrived to a state of the utmost perfection. They are for ever employed in searching into and admiring the mysteries of the grace of God; and shall not we esteem them fit subjects of our contemplation here? Oh, the blindness and stupidity of those who see no beauty, no glory in the scheme of salvation!

2. Hence we learn, *That none should despair of salvation, because of the greatness of their sins.* There is a secret despair which lies in the breast of the sinner, and slays its thousands, yea, its ten thousands. When any conviction is made upon the mind, it is immediately suggested to the poor sinner, that it is in vain for him to hope for mercy; his sins have been attended with such aggravating circumstances, that no pardon will be granted. Besides, the difficulties of the divine life are so great, that he can never expect to surmount them. He may as well therefore continue his pursuits, and enjoy as much pleasure as he can, and give up all thoughts of being a Christian. With these suggestions the sinner stifles every conviction, and eagerly pursues sensual gratifications, leaving the awful consequence. Is this the case with any of you? You may immediately conclude that it is an invention of Satan, to secure you the more under his power. Your sins are not

too great to be forgiven; nor are the difficulties of the Christian life insurmountable to those that depend upon the *strength of Christ*. Many have been pardoned, who have been as vile as you; therefore do not despair, and so continue in sin. Oh, that I could convince you, sinner! I would use all possible means. I would endeavour to set before you all the riches of the grace of God, take you to the cross of Christ, and show you an infinite sacrifice. I would present you with a long catalogue of first-rate sinners, pardoned and saved. Do not entertain the dangerous thought then, that there is no mercy for you; but attend to the important convictions made at any time on your mind, and look to Jesus to justify and save you.

3. *Though what has been said tends to encourage every sinner to look to Jesus for salvation, yet it encourages none to continue in sin.* They that from hence say, "Let us sin, that grace may abound," are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. There is no mercy, no salvation for those that continue in sin. *He that covereth his sins, shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy.* Prov. xxviii. 13.

CASE VII.

What judgment should that person pass upon himself, who knows himself to be in a dark and corrupt frame, but finds himself greatly unaffected with it, and stupid under it?

THIS very interesting and important question is taken into consideration, in consequence of the following letter; which, though it be very long, yet will not be found tedious to those who have experienced any variety in the Christian life; because the whole of it is so spiritual and experimental.

"SIR,

"HAVING long walked uncomfortably, and apprehending my case to be different from the common experience of the people of God, under their darknesses and doubts, I would

desire your judgment and advice upon it. I know it is no uncommon thing for those who are renewed by grace to complain of indwelling sin, of the strength of their corruptions, of the weakness of their graces, of the hidings of God's face, and of distressing doubts and fears upon these accounts. But, in the midst of all, there is love to God, and desires after him, which are manifested by their earnest seeking of him; as the church says: *The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night.* Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. Christ is precious to them; and could you assure them of their interest in him, they would rejoice and be comforted, as knowing that in him they should have all they want,—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But it is not so with me. My heart, alas, is alienated from God, backward and contrary to the exercises of religion. I have lost all delight in spiritual things! I cannot call the Sabbath a delight, nor attend to any ordinance with pleasure! Very different is my character from what is described Ps. i. 2. *His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* And as different must be my language from what the Psalmist uses, Ps. cxix. 97. *O how love I thy law!* Those words in Isa. liii. 2. *He hath no form nor comeliness,* seem more like the language of my heart and ways; and God may complain of me as in Hos. viii. 12.

“When I bow before the Lord in secret, it is with a servile temper; not thankful, as enjoying a privilege; but from a sense of absolute necessity, being convinced of my need of mercy.

“When I am not altogether in a stupid, dull, indolent frame, I bewail before him the wretched depravity of my nature, and the dreadful effects of it through the whole man, appearing in pride, unbelief, neglect of God, and the like. But I am more affected with these things as my misery, than as my sin, and therefore fear I do not come to Christ, as those do who are drawn by the Father.

“I set my name to that inventory, *wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* Rev. iii. 17. And one would think, where there is a sense of these things, the kind, condescending, and encouraging language in the next words should excite some sense of gratitude, in the exercise of which would be some delight. But it is far otherwise in my experience. It is true, I cannot but acknowledge that the Saviour God has appointed, and the method of salvation he has established, do exactly suit my miserable and helpless condition; and it is owing to the free, unconditional promises and invitations of

the gospel, that any hope is kept alive in my soul: (but you know *that hope deferred makes the heart sick.*) In the exercise of this free hope I can sometimes plead with God, that if I am to this day wholly under the power of a carnal mind, he can, by the exercise of his sovereign grace, renew and save me, consistently with all the glorious perfections of his nature; yet the Lord knows how unaffected I am with, and how unthankful for, these encouragements.

“If I look back to past experience, when I walked more comfortably, I remember the jealousies which then arose in my mind; doubting that I did not in reality love Christ above all, and give the preference to spiritual and heavenly things.

“As these doubts arose from what I found working within, so a reflection on my outward conversation tends to confirm them; while I judge by this rule, *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*, Matt. xii. 34. For I know of no duty in the christian life, which I have more neglected, than speaking of the things of God, partly through the reservedness of my natural temper, but chiefly through a want of being suitably impressed with a sense of those great, glorious, and gracious discoveries he has made in his word.

“Since this night of inward darkness, I have been visited once and again with bereaving providences; and I find that under these my affections are working strongly after the creatures, though but very faintly after God. But, in the midst of all, I have many and great mercies, yet for want of thankfulness, I lose the enjoyment of them. You will easily allow, that the case of one, who can neither look to earth or heaven, within or without, with any comfort or pleasure, must be very distressing. If for a few minutes I find the pressure of inward troubles a little lightened, the weight of outward ones presses in, and keeps down my spirits; and so the clouds are still gathering, and God’s anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

“I think I have taken care, in representing my case, not to exceed on the dark side, which perhaps persons under darkness may be apt to do. And now, Sir, I ask, should the Lord call me out of this world in my present condition, can you see any room to hope that I should be made a *partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light*? O that the Lord, who perfectly knows the state of my case, and how far my true character is drawn in these lines, would give you a discerning judgment into this important affair!”

THUS you have the case drawn out at large in a train of experiences, which is comprised, in a compendious way, in the question now under consideration. And, after you have read over and reviewed this case attentively, I will venture to appeal to you, if you have had any considerable experience of that variety which is in the Christian life, whether this case is so peculiar or uncommon, as our friend imagines. So far from it, that I am verily persuaded, from my own experience, and the various observations I have made upon the experience of others, that the far greater number of true believers can adopt almost every particular of these complaints to themselves at seasons. When our friend intimates, that he apprehends his case to be different from the common experience of God's people; though his thoughts are in some measure just, yet he evidently magnifies the workings of grace in others, and diminishes them as to himself. But remember, my dear friend, if you were to enter into serious conversation with those complaining believers, whose spiritual love and desire you speak so strongly of, you would find them absolutely unwilling to allow the whole true concerning themselves, and making the same complaints with you; and in their conversation you will find them as ready to think and speak favourably of you, as you are to think and speak favourably of them.

This spirit of *complaining modesty* is too common among Christians in the present day; although there is something of that amiable disposition in it, of esteeming each other better than themselves. Do you think their case better than yours? Go to them, and enter into free spiritual discourse, and you will find them thinking your case better than theirs. *Every heart knows its own bitterness*, and is too ready to magnify it. But you have no more reason to discourage your soul, because you think you see that grace working in them, which you cannot observe in yourself, than they have to discourage themselves, because they observe that grace working under your complaints, which they do not see in themselves. Do not say your case is peculiar and uncommon; for you may take it for granted, that most other complaining Christians conceive theirs to be peculiar likewise.

Having thus prepared the way to prevent such soul-sinking thoughts, I would do these *three* things:

I. I would go through the particulars contained in this case distinctly:

II. Give my opinion upon the whole taken together in one view: And then,

III. Conclude with a few words of advice.—And O that the Spirit of God might set it home upon the hearts of all those who make the same complaints, and are under the same distresses and doubts!

I. The *particular complaints contained in this letter* are numerous, but may be all comprised under the following heads, in the order the letter places them:

1. As to your *religious duties*. You complain that you are backward to them, can take no delight in them, and can see nothing of the beauty of Christ through them. This is, doubtless, a very melancholy frame of soul, and such as calls for deep humiliation. But do not think, that it is a complaint which the children of God are strangers to. The best of believers are, at seasons, in a carnal, dull, and stupid frame of spirit. But then they cannot be satisfied with it, nor properly contented under it: they are out of their element, while thus out of frame for spiritual duties. And is not this your case? If it be, let me assure you that while this spiritual disorder proves the badness of your frame, your uneasiness under it, and dissatisfaction with it, is a promising indication of the renewal of your nature, and of the safety of your state. I doubt not, but you do really dislike these frames of soul, and from the very bottom of your heart desire to be delivered from them, and to have a spiritual delight in divine ordinances restored to your soul, and to see God's glory, as you have seen it in the sanctuary. Though you cannot take pleasure in divine ordinances; yet you desire it: though you cannot see the beauty of Christ in them; yet you say, *I desire to see Jesus*. And if this be a just description of the bias and tendency of your soul, then it must be said, that still *the desire of your soul is to his name, and the remembrance of him*.

2. As to your *secret devotions and supplications*. You complain that they are performed with a servile spirit, not as enjoying a privilege, but as driven by absolute necessity. Bless God, that he by the Spirit of conviction, and by an intimate knowledge of yourself, drives you to a throne of grace. It is a sign you are not quite lifeless, ignorant, stupid, or prayerless. It is a mercy you can at any time plead with God for spiritual blessings, and can wrestle with him, as one in a necessitous, helpless condition. And it is evident you are not entirely destitute of all encouragement, or devoid of all the drawings of the Father; because you are directed to a *throne of grace*. Do not call this a disposition *merely servile*; because, though necessity drives you, yet some glimmerings of free grace invite

you. It is true, we ought always to esteem it an invaluable privilege to be admitted to the mercy-seat of the Lord. But what is it that makes it a privilege? It is principally this; because the necessity of our case, and the helplessness of our condition, require it. And when you go to God in Christ under a sense of your absolute need, you really go to embrace a privilege; as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge, accounting it a great mercy that he had such a city to fly to. Endeavour therefore to learn the value of the privilege from the feeling you have of your need, since the real value of it will be heightened, by so much the more as your condition is necessitous.

3. As to your *occasional awakenings out of your wonted stupidity*. Under these you bewail the depravity of your nature, and the sad effects of it; but complain that you bewail these things rather as your *misery* than as your *sin*. But let me ask, what is it that makes your depravity, and its effects, in pride, unbelief, neglect of God, and the like, to be esteemed your *misery*? Your *pride* would be your *pleasure*, your *unbelief* would be your *boast*, your *neglect* of God would be your *ease* and *content*, if you had not some real sight and sense of their sinfulness. Can the depravity of nature be a misery to one that does not see the sinfulness of it? Can pride be a burden to him, who does not see the shamefulness of it? Can unbelief be a grief to one, who does not see the unreasonableness of it? Can neglect of God be an unhappiness to him, who does not see the fault of it? Surely, no. Whenever such things as these are *felt as miseries*, it is because they are *seen as sins*. It is this sight that lies at the bottom of these complaints, and makes them to be so burdensome and disagreeable.

4. As to *gospel-encouragements*. You complain that notwithstanding you see yourself wretched and miserable, yet you are sadly unaffected with them, and unthankful for them. This is indeed a sad evidence of the weakness or inactivity of faith; but you yourself have given a very sufficient reason, why you do not feel yourself sufficiently thankful for these glorious and encouraging invitations, by hinting, that *hope deferred makes the heart sick*.

And are you become thus *sick at heart*, because of the deferring of your hope? Remember, this is no other than what the spouse in the Canticles calls her *being sick of love*, Cant. v. 8. Which is a very peculiar experience; for, generally speaking, as faith increases or decreases in its exercise,

so does every other grace. But this is a case wherein *love*, as working in desire, is strong; but *faith* is weak, and ready to fail. And can you wonder, that you should feel no lively thankfulness in your soul for these gospel-promises, when every one knows that it must be a high degree of faith, which can enable a person to be sensibly thankful for a *bare* promise, while the fulfilment of the promise is delayed, and the soul is groaning and sinking for want of the blessings promised?

5. As to your *past experiences*. You mention that, when you reflected upon them, you had, even at the best of times, a jealousy in your mind, lest the whole was no more than a superficial work; that it was not sufficiently deep and spiritual. From hence you seem to conclude, that these jealousies arose from the faithful monitions of the Spirit of God; and so they intimate all was not right between God and your soul, even when you walked more comfortably than now. But give me leave to draw another conclusion from the same observation. This experience seems to intimate, that even then you was jealous over yourself with a godly jealousy: and these suspicions in your soul are so far from being indications that the work in your heart was superficial, that their being attended with this holy jealousy is a circumstance which makes them more likely to be true and saving. And if you did then, and can now beg of God seriously and sincerely, that he would search you, and see if there be any wicked way in you, you have great reason to hope, that both your past and present experiences have something of a true work of grace included in them.

6. As to your *present conduct and conversation*. You remark that a reflection upon this tends to confirm your former jealousies. But why? Do you live voluntarily in the commission of any known sin? Do you allow yourself in the constant neglect of any known duty? Or are you practising any secret iniquity, industriously hiding it from the eyes of the world, when you know you cannot hide it from the omniscient eye of God? If either of these is the case with you, then indeed you have abundant reason to suspect yourself to be no better than a painted hypocrite.

But what you mention is something of a quite different nature. You cannot speak so freely of the things of God, as you ought; and would, if you were suitably impressed with a sense of the great things of God. This neglect you own arises *in part* from a reservedness in your natural temper, for which gracious allowances are made, and, upon the whole, you are sensible of, complain under, and strive against this defect.

Surely then, nothing can be gathered from hence to confirm your jealousies concerning your state; but it only proves that the frame of your soul is not so spiritual and lively, as it ought to be; which affords matter for lamentation and excitement, but not for jealousy and discouragement.

7. As to the *bereaving and merciful providences you have been visited with*. You complain that the former do not appear to wean you from the creature, and that the latter do not promote a spirit of gratitude. This again is another experience that calls for deep humiliation of soul. But if serious persons ought to be continually questioning their state, because providences are not so sanctified to them as they desire or expect, we must all give up our hope. The purifying effect of afflictive providences is often undiscerned for a considerable time, and the endearing effect of merciful providences is often prevented for the present, by reason of their being accompanied with inward or outward troubles; as is evidently your case.

Thus I have offered a few thoughts, freely and briefly, upon the particulars of complaint in this epistle; and now proceed,

II. To give my opinion upon the whole taken together in one view; which shall be done in the few short hints following.

I conceive that the whole strain of these experimental complaints intimates,

1. That you have really fallen into that, which you seem so cautious against; namely, of exceeding on the dark side, setting forth the worst of the case, without attending to, or observing what groanings that cannot be uttered, are working under these complaints.

2. That the Lord has given you eyes to look into yourself, to attend to the experimental part of religion, as one that cannot be contented with the form of it; and so are well skilled in the duty of self-examination. But O that you had the art of improving what you find in yourself; not to discourage or sink you, but to quicken, animate, and encourage you to fly to and depend upon, Christ, for grace and righteousness.

3. That, in the midst of all these complaints, there is a real desire in your soul after gospel holiness, and gospel comfort. And though your frame is so dark, your heart so fearful, your soul so corrupted, and your affections so stupid, yet there is a love to Christ and holiness in your soul; only the delight and pleasure of this spiritual love is suspended or suppressed by the power of these heavy complaints. And if so, you exactly answer the character of those whom Christ has pronounced blessed, Matt. v. 3—6.

4. That all the fundamental graces of the Spirit are not only wrought in you, but are really *acting* under and against these spiritual disorders. It is the principle of *faith* that makes unbelief your burden. It is the principle of *hope* that struggles with your fears. It is the principle of *love* that makes your stupidity your complaint. It is the principle of *humility* that makes your pride your abhorrence. And it is a latent principle of *gratitude* which makes you see and lament the power of ingratitude in your soul. The *deeper* your distress is upon the account of these spiritual diseases, the *stronger* is the evidence of your having some principles in your heart, which are opposite to these inward corruptions.

III. I come now to conclude with a few words of advice.

Do not aim at getting ease under the power of these soul-maladies, so as to be in any danger of resting contented in your present sad frame of spirit; but be concerned to come out of it, and be delivered from it. And in order to this, go on in the way that you have mentioned and taken: *subscribing* yourself wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; *acknowledging* that the method of salvation by Christ exactly suits your necessitous case; *entreating* God, upon the footing of his free, sovereign, and powerful grace, that, if you are still in the gall of bitterness, he would renew and sanctify you; *encouraging* yourself before him with this thought, that he can renew, pardon, and save your soul in a full consistency with all the perfections of his nature; and pleading with him, that he would glorify himself more by saving than condemning you; more by delivering you out of this sad frame, than leaving you in it; more by giving you his quickening and enlivening grace, than by suffering you to remain in such a stupid, corrupt, and carnal frame. With these arguments you may fill your mouth, and encourage your heart before the Lord.

CASE VIII.

How may the times of family and closet duty be best regulated to the glory of God, our own comfort, and the advantage of those that are about us?

[This question was sent me with the following letter:]

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ THE consideration of your answer to the question on the 13th of November, has renewed some difficulties I have often had on my mind, with respect to the times of family and closet religion. You there remarked, that evening clubs and visits, so frequent amongst professors in the present day, are greatly injurious to the divine life. Now, as it is our duty to make religion appear amiable to all about us, and particularly to our families; and as a regular, uniform practice of religion may have a tendency to engage those about us at least to pay a reverence to that which perhaps before they despised; may not the frequent breaking through the times of family religion bring a reproach upon it in the eyes of our children and servants, and the performance of it sometimes at one season, sometimes at another, make them imagine religion to be only a work by the by? And yet, on the other hand, many unexpected circumstances turn up, and often oblige us to omit it, when perhaps it is the proper season, and to put it off to the last hour of the day; a time when we are in general unfit for the service of God. As to the religion of the closet, glad should I be always to have it performed when in the best frame of mind, which cannot be when we are drowsy through the fatigues of the day; but alas! this has been too much my case. To prevent this, I have sometimes thought, I have now some time, and therefore will improve it; yet, through the business and occurrences of the day, my thoughts have been far from being composed, and I have been in a suspense, whether to perform this duty or not. I have therefore sent you the above question, hoping an answer to it may give me satisfaction as to the path in which I should walk.”

THIS is a subject of great importance which calls for our consideration. May we be enabled to attend to it with the utmost seriousness, and with a full determination, through

divine grace, to pursue every conviction that may be made upon our minds concerning our duty! That I may answer this question so as may not only be suitable to this particular person, but also to all those who trifle with these sacred duties, I would throw my thoughts into the following method :

I. *Family and closet religion, morning and evening, are every way becoming the Christian character, and are necessary and important branches of Christian duty.* There is certainly no impropriety in these duties, but rather an entire suitableness to the profession we make. They show the Christian to be all of a piece; and uniformity in one of that sacred character, how ornamental, how adorning! Some have all the public appearances of zealous, active, and growing Christians: they plead for Christ, and testify their love to him at his table. But look into their families, and you can see nothing that savours of real religion. What an inconsistency is here! Joshua resolved, that *he and his house should serve the Lord*. Josh xxiv. 15. And Abraham had a mark of commendation put upon him by God himself for his care and diligence to teach his children and his household the way of the Lord. Gen. xviii. 19. Family prayer may not be essential to the Christian; but it is no honour to heads of families professing godliness, to have it said they have no religion in their houses. Some, not willing wholly to omit it, attend to it on the Lord's day; others, every evening. But is this filling up the character of a Christian, a head of a family? Is there not as great a necessity for worship, and as great a beauty in it, in the morning, as in the evening? Is it not a more comfortable thing to pray for preservation from sin in a morning, than to confess those faults we have fallen into for want of it, in the evening? It was a practice our forefathers were found in; a practice, I must say, necessary to our being flourishing Christians: it was a practice which God has for all ages set his seal to, by blessing those persons and families who have seriously attended to it.—As to closet religion, I persuade myself, no professing Christians can object to it, though too many such neglect it, and therefore their souls must be in a starving condition. We cannot be thriving Christians, and be but little with God in secret. It is here that we meet with God, as well as in public ordinances, and that he carries on his work in our souls, gives us communion with himself, and trains us up for glory.

II. *Family and closet religion should be performed in such a manner, and at such seasons, as may tend most to honour*

God, and promote the good of souls. We should not therefore pray, or read the scriptures, in a slothful, indifferent manner, as if these were duties of no importance. This is teaching our children and servants to look on them as trifling, and therefore as what may be either performed or not. We should not attend upon family duties in haste, or hurry them over, as if we wanted to be gone, or thought them a burden; nor should we perform them at unseasonable times, when it is most unlikely that God should be honoured, or our souls profited. We should attend with the utmost seriousness, pray with great affection, great reverence, and importunity of soul, that we may strike the minds of those about us with an awe of God, convince them of the excellency of real religion, and bring them to an esteem of sacred things. We should attend likewise at those times, when the great ends of these duties are most likely to be answered. Thus, in the closet, we should not think it enough just to mention a few things in prayer in a lifeless manner, or, as a parrot talks by rote, and then hurry away again as if the duty was over; nor should we choose those times when we cannot attend to duty as we ought. We should endeavour to enter upon closet duties in the most serious frame, and in general, aim to have so much time as to read a portion of God's word, think it over in our own minds, take a view of our own hearts, and then seek the Lord by prayer and supplication. In thus attending to these duties, we may hope for the presence and blessing of God to make them useful to our own souls, and the souls of our families.

III. *We should not wait till we find ourselves in a lively desirable frame, before we enter upon these duties.* The person who sent us this case, says, when he has had time to attend to closet worship, he has often found himself out of frame, and so has been under a difficulty whether to engage in that duty or not.—To guide us herein, we may observe,—*If we are not to wait upon God, till we find our souls in a suitable frame, we may not wait upon him at all.*—For instance—Suppose, with regard to closet duty, in the afternoon you have an opportunity for it, but you find your soul out of tune; the world crowds into your mind, and unfits you for waiting upon God; or some difficulties you have met with perplex your thoughts, or you find a sad slothfulness and drowsiness of soul. On this account you wait till the close of the day, hoping it will then be better with you: but, alas! it is much the same; nay, perhaps you find it worse with you; the hour of rest is almost come, and feeble nature wants some refreshment.

Must you omit the duty now, because you find your soul still out of frame? For the same reason you may put it off from day to day, and so live in the total neglect of it. If we are indisposed for duty, yet, if we apprehend this the most suitable opportunity we shall have for closet duties, let us embrace it. Let us call upon our souls to awake; let us read the word of God, and proceed to prayer: before the duty is over, our souls may be better; our afflictions may be enlivened; our hard hearts may be softened; we may feel the powerful influences of the love of Jesus, and may rise from our knees quickened and strengthened. In fine, if we wait for a good frame, we may neglect all duty, even public worship. Not that we are to encourage slothfulness, grow careless about the temper of our minds, and rush into the presence of God without seriousness. We should take some pains with our cold, frozen, and wandering hearts, before we enter upon public or private duties, and consider what we are going about. An attempt in some such manner as this may be a means of raising our attention, and of filling our souls with a peculiar solemnity—"I am going, O my soul, to be the mouth of my family to God, to read his word, and to go before them in religious duties: but oh, why this trifling sleepy frame? Consider what thou art going about, and let me be upon my watch, lest my family should see any thing in my spirit or behaviour, that may give them a distaste to any part of religion. Lord, do thou warm my heart, that with lively affection I may seek thee for my dear children and servants, may mourn over their sins, and commit them to thy grace and protection, that they may be satisfied of the reality of religion, and that I have a true concern for their immortal souls."—Or, if you are entering upon closet duties, endeavour to get your minds composed. With some degree of solemnity say to your souls—"I am going to separate a few moments from the world, and engage in the worship of the closet. But, O my heart! why so cold? Why this indifference? Come, O my soul! let thy loins be girt, and thy lights burning: who knows but I may meet with my Lord? He may favour me with his gracious presence, and I may find it to be a pleasant hour. Away then these trifling thoughts. Where is my faith, my zeal, my love?"—Thus as we should not wait for a suitable frame, so we should not rush boldly upon duties, but labour to get our minds freed from dulness and distractions, and filled with that seriousness of spirit that is suited to the solemn duties we are called to.

IV. *As there is no particular hour appointed in the word of*

God for family and closet religion, so we must attend to these duties at those seasons that we judge are most suited to the conveniencies of both, and to answer the ends for which they are calculated. As to the time or hour of family prayer, it is a prudential thing, and should be suited to the circumstances of families, that we may make this part of religion as easy as possible, that so those under our care may not esteem it burdensome, and attend upon it grudgingly. If a master exercises a sovereign authority in this case, and determines the time, without consulting what may be most suitable to the family, he may, by such imprudence, prejudice the minds of some of his family against him, and against that worship that is of so much importance. As much depends upon a person's prudence, so let me give you the following directions :

1. *Look upon it as a matter of great concern to have family and closet religion suitably attended to.* In the one, your families are concerned ; in the other, your own souls. Do not treat these things therefore as trifling matters, but as what deserve much study, care, and thought, to perform in a manner that may be useful to those who are to join with you, win upon the minds of your children and servants, and convince them that there is a reality and importance in religion. And as to closet religion, the prosperity of your own souls is concerned. If you are negligent or careless here, you are like to go on in a customary lifeless manner, and not get one step forward to appearance in your way to heaven. It requires therefore your serious consideration, how and when to perform these duties, so as may answer the most valuable purposes.

2. *Carry the matter to God by prayer for direction.* In all circumstances we should look up to God, especially in those affairs wherein his glory is most evidently concerned. This affair calls for a great measure of prudence, seriousness, faithfulness, and resolution ; therefore you should be often looking up to him for guidance, and for every thing that is necessary towards the profitably discharging the duties of the family and the closet. Beg of God, that he would impress you with a sense of the importance of these duties to your family and to your own souls ; that he would enable you to have his glory in view in them ; and that he would make you desirous of attending to them in such a manner, and at such seasons, as may answer some great and valuable ends to those that join with you in them. In thus doing you may expect the blessing of God upon you, and all that direction he has promised (Prov. iii. 6.) and that is suitable to your particular difficulties.

3. *As there is no particular direction or command in the word of God as to the hour of private and family worship, so there is nothing criminal in not observing a stated fixed time.* Some families have but little interruption. Their circumstances will easily permit them to settle a particular hour for worship. Yet at times, even these may be prevented by some unexpected occurrences from observing the time appointed. Let not these think they are criminal in this; for it is not the *time* that is so much to be regarded, as the worship itself, and the manner of its being conducted. Other families cannot fix upon any particular hour; their circumstances are so situated, as to render it impracticable, without the highest and most evident inconvenience. To observe a settled rule is not absolutely necessary to make the family think well of religion. Through custom they may fall into formality, and lose the spirit of worship. When you perform it sometimes at one time, and sometimes at another, it does not tend to lessen their esteem for it, provided it is not owing to any apparent negligence in you, and that you go about it in a suitable manner. Your families will in general see the reasons of your not keeping to an hour; will in some measure weigh them in their own minds, and pass their verdict on your conduct; therefore we should be careful how we act, so as to keep in their minds honourable thoughts of religion, and yet so as to avoid sinking into formality and superstition. Thus, as to closet worship, we are not to pay any superstitious regard to any particular hour, but chiefly to regard the manner in which we attend.

4. *Examine seriously and thoroughly the case, and take that method that appears to you most conducive to honour God, and to promote your own and your family's good.* Here I would be a little particular as to morning and evening worship.

1. *As to morning worship.*—*As to the closet;* it seems to appear evident, that, if those duties are profitably performed, the best time is before we set about the world. If we neglect these till after we have been engaged in our secular affairs, we shall find it a difficult thing to perform them in a suitable serious manner, with a mind free from distractions. It is fittest that we should give God our first hours. It is good to begin the day with him. Watch over your frames then, when you rise; and, if you would spend much time with God in a morning, and so as may be for your growth in grace, and for your spiritual advantage, use yourselves to early rising. O thou sluggish Christian! Didst thou but know what sweet communion some have with God in the duties of the closet,

whilst thou art slumbering upon thy bed, it would certainly rouse and awake thee. O the precious moments that slide away, whilst thou art crying, *A little more sleep, a little more slumber*, it is time enough to rise! No wonder thou findest thy heart so cold, and the divine life so feeble and so languid in thy soul. Thou hast but little time to attend to it. Thou spendest so many hours in sleep, that, as soon as thou risest from thy bed, thy business calls for thy attention; and so thou must either neglect thy closet, or sadly curtail the duties of it, and perform them in a cold and trifling manner.

As to family religion in a morning—Which appears the most fit and proper, to call the family together as soon as possible, or to defer it till after we have refreshed animal nature, and sat down as a family to our morning meal? The first certainly seems to be the most suitable; yet all families are not in the same circumstances, and therefore cannot all do alike. I would not by this encourage you to an indifference to, or a neglect of, these duties, but leave it to your prudence as to the time. Seriously weigh the matter; and, if you can call the family together, or as many as can be spared from the necessary affairs of life, let it be done as soon as possible, because you and their minds are then freest from distractions: But, if you should meet with unexpected interruptions, yet do not neglect the worship, but catch the first opportunity to attend it.

2. *As to evening worship*.—Consider your engagements in the evening, and embrace that time that may appear most convenient to yourselves and families.—*As to yourselves in the closet*.—If you can spend some time with God before you go out, let it be done; as this may be a means of keeping you amidst any temptations that may fall in your way, and of keeping you from a frame of mind that may be dishonourable to God, and injurious to your own souls. As to your families, you may take the same method with them too, provided your engagements appear necessary, and attending to them would put off family worship to an unseasonable hour. If you have your evenings in general to yourselves, it appears fittest to worship God before the evening meal. Then your spirits are freest, your bodies have least fatigue: whereas if you defer it to the last hour, you may be rendered unfit for it through the hurries of the day; and your families wanting rest, may think it rather burdensome, instead of joining in it with any degree of pleasure and willingness. This will be to offer *the halt and the lame* in sacrifice to God; therefore avoid this, if you possibly can. But, if through some unexpected occurrences it

cannot be prevented, then guard your families against heaviness.—If your evenings are not your own, you must then embrace that time that Providence offers you. Here do not mistake me: I would not encourage persons to a habit of spending their evenings abroad, to the neglect of their families and their closets. But as this cannot at times be avoided, so use that prudence that becomes your character as Christians.

In fine—Do not be overscrupulous on the one hand, or negligent on the other. Do not think, because you cannot keep to a fixed hour, or because through interruptions you cannot fulfil your resolutions, that you are criminal, provided the souls of your families lie upon your minds, you desire to honour God in your houses, and are enabled to attend to family duties in a serious, solemn, and instructive manner. And do not willingly indulge any slothfulness or negligence; but carefully guard against every thing that has a tendency to dishonour God, and give those around you any trifling thoughts of religion. Having thus given you a few thoughts upon this important subject, I would close with a particular address to different sorts of persons. And,

1. *To those that neglect family and closet religion.*—And are there any such amongst you? Do you call yourselves *Christians*? Do you make a profession? What, and yet never pray, neither in family nor closet? I pity you with my whole soul. Permit me to expostulate with you a little upon this head. I dare not say you are not Christians, because you pray not in your families; but I may certainly say, that you act not as such. Oh, do you never consider the sad example you are setting before your dear children and servants? Do you never consider the cruelty you are guilty of to their souls? Do you never view that awful day, when you must give an account of your stewardship? Are you professors, and yet nothing of God in your families? Have your servants seen as much in a heathen family as in yours? What a dishonour are you, ye irreligious parents and masters, what a dishonour to the Christian cause! Never complain of your children's wickedness, your servants' impiety: you never taught them better by an example in the family; you never prayed with them.—And do you neglect closet religion too? I may then warrantably say, you are no Christians, except in name. Your hopes of salvation are all in vain: you are yet in your sins. O! let me importune you to consider, before it is too late! your souls are perishing, starving, sinking, and will soon be lost for ever, unless sovereign grace plucks you as *brands out of the burning*!

Oh, whilst you are crying Peace, peace! how awful, if *sudden destruction should come upon you, as travail upon a woman with child!* Then you shall not, you cannot possibly escape! O that I could draw or drive you to your knees!

2. *I would address those who keep up family worship in part, but not regularly.* Some of you, perhaps, only attend on the Lord's day. This day you cannot let slip, without showing your families that you have some regard for religion, though all the week you can slight it. And why is this? What, is religion of no importance on a week-day? Are your families never to be put in mind of God and eternity in the week? You perhaps cannot find time. Your engagements are such, that you cannot be at home till an unseasonable hour; and then you are in a great measure unfitted for it, and so neglect it. Thus you will gratify an inclination to pleasure or company every evening, and neglect your own and your family's souls. Excuse the liberty I take with you; it is, I hope, if I know my own heart, out of regard to the honour of my Redeemer, and tender love to your souls.—Others attend every evening, but not in the morning. Your greatest objection, I apprehend, to morning worship, is want of an opportunity. But, if you were to leave your beds a little earlier, and manage your affairs with discretion, you would soon see the vanity of this excuse, and easily find time for morning worship. Can you rationally expect the blessing of God upon you in the day? Is it not worth asking for as a family? Remember, an excuse may pass with man, but not with God. Can you tell *Him* you have no time? Oh, consider seriously this weighty affair!

3. *I would address those that keep up the worship of the family morning and evening.* And I would call upon you to examine your ends and views in all you do, to inquire into the frame in which you generally attend upon family religion, and to be humble wherein you have been defective. How lame have your duties oftentimes been! How imperfectly performed! How often hurried over, as if a task! Have you been concerned to impress your children and servants with a real sense of religion? Have you not been contented with mere prayer; but have you to this added instruction too? Have the souls of your families lain upon your hearts? Have you prayed for yourselves and them, like persons in good earnest? And have you endeavoured to walk agreeably to your prayers? Has it been your concern to live in the discharge of those duties you have recommended to your families? Is it your endeavour to walk so, that they may not think *meanly* of that religion you

profess? Go on, my dear friends, in your families and your closets, and let nothing discourage you.

4. *I would address those who are just entering into the world, and becoming heads of families.* It is oftentimes a difficulty with such to set up family religion. But, O my friends, what is there for you to be ashamed of? Can you not pray with that connexion and fluency of expression, that you think may be useful? Do not be discouraged; but attempt it in the strength of the Lord, and you will find him far better to you than all your fears. God does not always make the finest prayers the most useful, but blesteth weak means to carry on his work. Fear not, he will encourage your small beginnings. If you give way to fears, they will grow upon you, and consequently your difficulties of setting up religion in your families increase. Go to God, therefore, and beg that he would give you courage and resolution to walk before and in your family, suitably to your character. Set up religion therefore in the name and strength of the Lord, and fear not; you will find him a good Master to serve. Do not neglect family worship, let me entreat you. If you expect the blessing of God upon your worldly endeavours; if you would enjoy peace in your own minds; if you would have a religious family, and have prosperity in your own souls; in fine, if you would honour Christ in your day; set up family worship. Oh, begin with God, and let all around you see, that amidst your pursuits of this world, you desire to have your eyes chiefly fixed upon another, and to make the concerns of your souls your principal business!

5. *I would address those who have the privilege of being in families where religion is kept up.* And,

(1.) *I would speak to children*—And you, my young friends, who have the privilege of religious parents, and with that all the privileges of family religion, have reason indeed to be thankful. How many children hear nothing but blasphemies from their parents, and see nothing but what tends to poison their minds, and to increase that hatred of divine things, with which they were born! But you have been instructed in the principles of religion; you have had a good example before you. You know your parents love you: for they watch over your souls: they weep over you, they carry you to the throne of grace, and would rejoice to see you the children of God. O happy souls! what numbers of petitions have been, and are daily sent up to heaven for you! Happy souls to have a visible interest in the promise, Gen. xvii. 7. *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee!* Sure, your hearts have been

often melted ! Sure, you highly esteem your privileges ! *You* cannot be profane and careless, sure ! Oh, for you to sin costs you much ! For you to live and die strangers and enemies to Christ, will be inexpressively awful ! What must the punishment be, that will be inflicted upon you ! “ Here is a child of religious parents, (may we not suppose the Judge saying ?) here is one who had all the privileges of a religious education ; but he would not hearken to the entreaties of his parents : he was deaf to every argument, and hardened under all their tears. Take him away, ye ministers of vengeance, heat the furnace seven times hotter for him, and let him have his dwelling with everlasting burnings.”—Oh, tremble, tremble, my dear young friends, tremble at the thoughts of being found enemies to Jesus ; and beg of God, that he would enable you to prize your privileges, and give you the teachings of his Spirit, that you may grow under all your enjoyments, and be the real followers of a dear Mediator !

(2.) *I would speak to you, who are servants in such families*—And do you prize your mercies ? Bless God, that he has cast your lot where you hear of Jesus and salvation ; where you are under the care of praying masters, such as long for the salvation of your souls. How many have been under some convictions ; but, being in irreligious families, their convictions have been stifled, and through the influence of an evil example, have gone back to folly. But you are not only where you hear of salvation, but where every conviction upon your minds will be cherished and encouraged, and all means used to bring you to a saving acquaintance with Christ, and promote your growth in grace. Prize your privileges ; esteem those you serve highly ; attend to their instructions, and let your walk and conversation be suitable to your character and enjoyments. If you should perish, how many will rise up against you, and say, “ We had not the privileges of a religious master ; we heard nothing of Jesus ; but you had daily opportunities of hearing of salvation, and of attending to the concerns of your souls ! ” O how cutting the reflection, to consider that once you were *prisoners of hope*, were invited and exhorted to seek after an interest in Jesus Christ ; but now it is over with you *for ever* ! O that you may be sensible of your invaluable enjoyments, carefully and seriously attend family worship, and be concerned to know God, and the gospel of his dear Son !
Amen.

CASE IX.

Is it not presumptuous for a person to hope he has an interest in Christ, when he sees little or nothing in himself but reason to doubt and question it?

THIS question came to me in almost these very words; and, upon an attentive view of its nature and design, I could not but apprehend that a distinct solution of it would have a great tendency to convince the presumptuous, and encourage the fearful. Some presumptuously endeavour to persuade themselves that they have an interest in Christ, that their sins are pardoned, and that their state is safe, and so deceive themselves, to the ruin of their souls; and nothing is more dangerous than such a presumptuous hope; because it is a strong barrier in the way of their receiving that conviction of their sin and misery, that is necessary to drive them out of themselves and their sins to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, some are as much afraid of receiving the true hope of the gospel, lest they should be guilty of presuming upon Christ and the promises, when they have no right to either; and nothing is more uncomfortable, distressing, and deterring, than the prevalency of such a fear. It must be acknowledged to be a very difficult matter to steer the right course between these two extremes: for some abuse the freeness of the gospel, by imagining that since Christ and his grace are entirely free, therefore they have nothing to do but to cast away all their suspicions, and positively and absolutely to believe that Christ is theirs; while a serious person, being sensible that there is such a thing as a false, vain hope, is therefore very backward to embrace the glad tidings of salvation in Christ for himself, and he makes the sight he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and pollution, a bar in the way of his hope, because he can see nothing in himself to ground it upon. The fearful soul reasons after this manner: it is certainly presumption, in all cases, to believe without evidence; and no sort of persuasion can be more dangerous, than a groundless belief of an interest in Christ; and since I have no ground in myself, to believe in or hope for this, therefore I must never venture to apply Christ to myself, until I can see and feel some solid evidences in myself of a work of true grace in my soul. And

thus the serious person argues against himself, and prevents himself from embracing Christ as a free Saviour. It is in this view, and with this difficulty upon the mind, that the present question seems to be put: *Would it not be presumptuous for me to hope concerning an interest, when I know and feel myself to be so guilty and corrupt, and can see nothing in me, but what tends to damp a hope of this kind?* A direct and immediate answer to this question cannot be given; for we cannot positively say, in all cases, either that it is presumptuous, or that it is not so; because that hope, which we endeavour to receive, encourage, and maintain, may in one case be the false hope of a hypocrite; and in another case it may be the struggling of the spirit of faith, in opposition to the fears and doubts, suggested by the power and prevalency of unbelief.

That I might carry this matter even, so as not to encourage a false hope, nor discourage a true one, I would mention the cases wherein such hope is presumptuous, and under each particular, as I pass on, would show in what cases this hope is such, as may and ought to be entertained and encouraged.

1. It is presumptuous to persuade yourselves of an interest in Christ, *when you have no real hearty concern about it.* Perhaps your souls make it a very light matter to believe in Christ, or to believe that he is your own; you can easily and calmly persuade yourselves into this opinion. You do not care much about the matter, having never had a real, heart-impressive sense of your guilt, danger, pollution, and need of an interest in Jesus; only you persuade yourselves that all is well with you, because God is merciful, and Christ is free; and this opinion you entertain on purpose to make yourselves the more easy and satisfied where you are. This is certainly a presumptuous hope, and whoever receives and maintains it is in the utmost danger of deceiving and ruining his own soul.

But this seems very different from the case of him who puts this question, with proper seriousness and concern.

Your souls, in putting the query, look upon it as a matter of the greatest importance. You would give all the world to be certain of an interest in the atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and sanctifying grace of Christ; your hearts are set upon these things. But, because you cannot arrive at this comfortable satisfaction, you therefore hang down your heads, and go mourning all the day in darkness and fear. Remember, for your encouragement, ye concerned souls, that if ye are really desirous of, and cannot be satisfied without the blood of Christ for your pardon, the righteousness of Christ for your

justification, and the Spirit of Christ for your purification ; you may, under this concern and these desires, apply yourselves to Christ, and apply Christ to yourselves, without any danger of presuming ; because you may be sure the grace of Christ is so free, that, if a whole Christ be welcome to you, you are welcome to Christ and all his salvation.

2. It is presumptuous to persuade yourselves of an interest in Christ, *if the persuasion be contrary to the tenor of your conduct.* If you are profane in your words, immoral in your practice, or indulge some secret iniquity in your hearts ; surely for you in this case to persuade yourselves of an interest in the favour of God, and the salvation of Christ, must be daring presumption, for Christ is not, and cannot be the minister of sin. It is a presumption of the same nature with that mentioned in Micah iii. 11. *The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money ; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us ? No evil can come upon us.* See here, that there is such a thing as leaning upon the Lord in the love and practice of sin ; but it is a very presumptuous trust.

But if you are, and really desire to be, conscientious in your conduct, circumspect in your behaviour, and to be found walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless, hating every false way, and you come to Christ for strength against sin, and for grace to purify your hearts and lives, as well as for the removal of your guilt ; this is a desire that ought to be promoted, and a hope in Christ that ought to be encouraged.

3. It is presumptuous to persuade yourselves of an interest in Christ, *if the persuasion be contrary to the conviction of your own consciences.* This head does in some measure coincide with the former. But I mention it, that I might take an occasion to explain a text, and obviate a difficulty which has perplexed some serious minds. The passage referred to is, 1 John iii. 20, 21. *For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.* The difficulty drawn from these words is to this effect. The distressed soul speaks in this language : “ In how many things does my heart condemn me ! What backwardness to duty, what deadness and inactivity in the ways of God, does my heart convince me of, and condemn me for ! These, and many many more things have I to lay to my own charge ! How then can I have any confidence towards God ? Or, how can

I dare to hope in him, or depend upon him for pardon and salvation?"

To this I reply, if your conscience condemns you, as to the secret indulgence of, and delight in, any particular known sin, or as to the voluntary, stated, allowed omission of any known duty; and you endeavour to stifle these convictions, and suppress or silence these rebukes of conscience, by attempting to persuade yourselves that Christ is yours; this is indeed truly and awfully presumptuous. In this case your own conscience forbids you to think that you have an interest in Christ, and plainly tells you that in this state and frame of soul, you have *no part nor lot* in these matters. Oh, do not attempt to stifle, silence, or suppress these convictions; but rather yield to them, and pray that God would fasten them upon your spirits, and that he would not let them subside, that he would continue and fix them, that you might no longer lie asleep in sin; but may fly to Jesus Christ for pardon and purification! And take it for granted, that so long as you maintain a voluntary love to, and delight in, any particular sin, which your conscience condemns you for, so long your souls and Jesus Christ are parted asunder.

But how very different is this from the case of one, whose great, whose chief desire, is to be delivered from the power and practice of every sin; who sees and laments the corruption of his nature, the deadness of his frame, and the carnality of his heart; and who would fain hope concerning an interest in Christ for his deliverance from these spiritual evils! And if this be the real temper of your souls, do not say, *My heart condemns me; and how can I have confidence towards God;* rather say, *My conscience does not condemn me, as to any allowed guile, or any indulged iniquity; since it is the real desire of my soul, that God would search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me: and therefore I may with humble confidence go to God in Christ for pardoning and cleansing grace.*

4. It is presumptuous to persuade ourselves of an interest in Christ, *if the hope be contrary to the proposal of Christ in the gospel.*—This thought will be found a peculiarly turning point, with respect to the nature of our hope. If our souls fly to and receive Christ, as he is proposed in the gospel to us, the hope arising from hence is such as ought to be encouraged, because it is such as will not make ashamed. But, if we do not apply to, and receive Christ, under those characters, and for those blessings which the gospel displays, then there is an

essential flaw in our hope; for the Christ we hope in, is not the Christ of God. Give me leave here just to mention three important particulars concerning the view in which the gospel proposes, and true faith receives, Christ; namely, 1. As a *free* Saviour. 2. As the *only* Saviour. 3. As a *complete* Saviour.

1. As a *free* Saviour. Some persons, in their first application to Christ, endeavour to persuade themselves of an interest in him, because they think they have something in themselves, or have done something by themselves, that will recommend them to his regard. This they seek after, and can never think they have a right to lay hold of him, until they can find something of his nature in them; and thus they hope in him, not as a *free*, but as a *conditional* Saviour. Now, if this be the first ground of your hope, it is a *proud*, and therefore a *false* or *suspicious* one; whereas every soul that hopes in Christ aright, sees itself to be utterly unworthy of, and unprepared for Christ, and runs to him as a Saviour entirely free. Now, if you see and feel yourselves utterly unworthy, guilty, weak, and polluted, and have nothing in yourselves to hope in, but endeavour to hope in Christ as a free Saviour; this endeavour is by no means presumptuous. See here how completely the scale is turned from what unbelief would suggest. A discouraged, distressed person is apt to think it presumptuous for him to hope about an interest in Christ, unless he sees or can find something within him to encourage that expectation; whereas, if he imagined any thing within him as the ground of his encouragement, this very circumstance tends to render the whole suspicious. Is it presumptuous to receive a free gift, to plead a free promise, to come upon a free invitation, to build upon a free foundation? Surely no. Whereas, if you are determined to force a condition upon Christ, or to come with a price in your hands to him, that is what Christ will reject and disdain.

2. As the *only* Saviour. If you hope you have an interest in Christ, but do not make him the *whole* of your salvation, but are for joining along with him, your own duties, righteousness, qualifications, or attainments, this will be found a false or suspicious hope. But, if you trust in him *alone*, casting aside all your own strength and righteousness, as bearing any share in your justification; then the language of your heart corresponds with the sentiments of the pious Psalmist, whose soul was built upon a right foundation, Ps. lxii. 5. *My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation*

is from him. And if you can heartily say, as in the next verse, *He only is the rock of my salvation*; you may add what immediately follows, *He is my defence; I shall not be moved.*

3. As a *complete* Saviour. Christ and his salvation are entirely free; but, if there be any condition allowable, it is this: if you would have Christ, you must have a *whole* Christ; if you would have salvation, you must have a *complete* salvation. Christ is not divided, nor his salvation neither. If you are for but half a Christ; for his righteousness and blood to pardon and justify you, but not for his Spirit and grace to renew and sanctify you; your hope in him is false and dangerous. But, if it be your desire and aim to receive him, whole and entire; to receive his doctrines, instructions, and illuminations, as a prophet; to receive his righteousness, and merit, as a priest; and to receive or submit to his government, and sin-subduing grace, as a king; you need not fear to hope in him.

Thus, as Christ stands in the gospel under the character of a free and complete Saviour, and the only one, we are to hope in him accordingly. Once more,

V. It is presumptuous to persuade ourselves of an interest in Christ, *if the persuasion be contrary to the designs of the gospel and its promises.* These designs may be thus briefly expressed; to humble the sinner, to glorify the Saviour, to purify the heart, and comfort the soul. Now then, Do you endeavour to hope concerning an interest in Jesus Christ? Ask your souls what is your design in this attempt and endeavour: Is it to have your state safe, and your conscience easy, in the way of sin? Is it that you may be rendered able to justify yourselves in part, by your own righteousness, or to sanctify yourselves, by your own strength? Is it to gratify your pride, that you may be able to make such a profession, or to perform such services, as may make your name honourable? If such as these are motives of your desire and endeavour to know your interest in Christ, they are all detestable and destructive.

But, if your desires to have, and to know that you have, an interest in Christ, be such as these, that you may be more spiritual in your frames, enjoy holy consolation in your souls; may be more pure in heart and life, may live more entirely upon Christ for righteousness and strength; may be humble in yourselves, and exalted alone in Christ's grace and righteousness; may be able to honour Christ more, serve him better, and may have more strength for, and more delight

in, spiritual duties: surely, such endeavours, such desires, and such hopes, are lawful, are laudable, and are by no means presumptuous. And what, though you may see little in yourselves, but reason to doubt and question your interest; yet be not afraid with such views and desires as these are, to lay hold of Christ for yourselves, and to lay an humble claim to him. And you will find, that nothing will be more helpful to regulate your ways, to subdue your sins, to strengthen you for duty, and to render you capable every way to glorify Christ, (which are the very things you desire) than a real hope and hearty belief, that Christ is yours, and you his.

But you will, perhaps, still be ready to say, How can I hope or believe that I have an interest in Christ, when I have no evidence in myself to prove it? I answer, this is only an abstract argument, which is urged by carnal reason, on purpose to promote discouraging unbelief, and to hinder a gospel hope. Is there no such thing as hoping against hope? Is not Christ set before you as the only Saviour, and as a complete Saviour, and as one entirely free? Look then into the proposals and promises of the gospel; and in *them*, though not in *yourselves*, you will find ground sufficient to encourage your application to Christ, and your application of him to yourselves, for your consolation, sanctification, and salvation.

CASE X.

Is going to plays and other theatrical performances, consistent with the profession and practice of Christianity?

[The answer to this question, you will find, is in consequence of the following letter:]

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I HAVE often been asked by my acquaintance to go to a play. But, having had the blessing of a religious education, and the good example of pious relations; and being apprehensive that such diversions tend to diminish, if not entirely to extinguish, the zeal we should have for the honour of God, and the purity of religion; to eradicate all serious impressions;

to cloud our evidences, and to make us careless about our precious and immortal souls, and remotely incline to impurity and irreligion; I have hitherto resisted their solicitations. But their entreaties becoming more frequent, and there being many truly religious persons who have gone, and still do at times go to the theatre, my resolutions are almost broken; therefore beg you will resolve the above query."

THE question I am now called to answer, needs not much consideration; it being, I apprehend, evident at first view, that going to *plays* and such pleasing entertainments cannot be suitable to our character as Christians, as tending greatly to the injury of our immortal souls. Yet, as there are so many who are captivated with these bewitching *vanities*, and are willing to find excuses for their pursuit of them, and say, *there is no harm in it*; as there are many who are in great danger of being carried away with these enchanting pleasures, and yet would be glad to be fortified against the snare, so I would take the case into particular consideration, and endeavour to convince you of the unsuitableness and danger of such *practices*. And may what I have to offer upon this subject strike your minds with a peculiar force! May you lie open to conviction; and, upon a consciousness of any evil attending this practice, be enabled to resolve, through divine strength, to guard against this, and every other pleasure, that has a tendency to injure your everlasting welfare, and break in upon the peace of your souls! For the truth of what I shall say, I would appeal to the consciences of those who attend *plays* and other *diversions* of the like kind, and only beg this favour, that you would give every thing that is said its due weight, and let *conscience* have its full liberty: let *that* but speak, and it will soon decide the point. Having thus in some measure prepared the way, I would recommend to your consideration the following things:

I. *Attending plays, and other diversions of the like kind, is by no means profitable to our souls.* If upon examination we find that no real advantage can be gained, it should be a means of curbing our inclinations, and of making us suspect, whether it is not our duty to guard against all such *diversions*. Some indeed plead as an excuse, that persons may make an improvement of the *theatre*, and gain as much advantage from a *play*, as from hearing a *sermon*. This is a sad reflection upon preaching the word; and however true it is as to some particular *sermons*, which are only *empty harangues*, contrary

to the genius of the gospel, and designed only to tickle the ear, and please the fancy; yet preaching, abstractedly considered, is a *divine institution*; and therefore we may expect a divine blessing upon it, to make it effectual to promote our spiritual advantage. This cannot be said of a *play*, which is a *mere human invention*, designed not to conform us to God, but only to amuse us: we cannot therefore reasonably expect the blessing of God upon it, to make it effectual to our real advantage. Such excuses as these are very trifling, and will not bear even the most superficial examination. There is so *much* that tends to eradicate all serious impressions, to corrupt the mind, and promote dissoluteness of manners; and there is so *little* that tends to usefulness, and this *little* attended with such circumstances, that there is not the least probability of our being real *gainers* by a *play*. Who would go to the *theatre*, or to *public diversions*, to learn to hate sin, to love holiness, and be brought nearer to God? Do any really attend with these views and desires? I appeal to you, Is it so? You who have frequented the *playhouse*, What led you thither? Was it a desire of spiritual advantage? I may answer for you, *No*; and say, you had not the most distant view to this. It was a love of pleasure, of mirth, that carried you thither, and not any view to the glory of God, or to your spiritual profit. You will perhaps say, there is something peculiarly awful in a *tragedy*: you have seen the assembly struck with a solemn silence; nay, many faces all bedewed with tears. This is no proof that any real advantage is gained. *Music* has all the charms of eloquence, all the force of oratory in it; and those who have a musical soul cannot withstand its influence. Its effects upon us, either to fill us with melancholy, or to elate us, will be according to the suitableness in the music to our natural frame and constitution. This you see therefore is something *mechanical*. So the passions may be touched and wound up to the highest pitch, by the manner of action upon the *stage*, but no saving spiritual impressions made, nor any good received. But, if there was any thing in a *tragedy* to strike the mind, and fit it for serious thoughtfulness; if there was any part of the performance, that tended to fasten a conviction upon the spectator; yet the evening generally concludes with some *indecent entertainment*, or something that tends to remove all gloom from the mind, and put an entire stop to all solidity of thought. Thus *plays*, not being calculated to promote our spiritual advantage, have nothing in them that should appear sufficient to engage our attention.—But,

II. *Much time is spent in these diversions, that might be spent to better purposes.*—Time is a precious thing, an invaluable jewel. None can speak its worth but a dying person, or those who have entered the regions of an awful eternity. And must this *time* be spent in vanity, or thrown away upon the empty unsatisfying pleasures of the present life? *Time!* Oh, what is it?

Time, the supreme!—Time is eternity:

Pregnant with all eternity can give:—

Who murders time, he crushes in the birth

A power ethereal, only not ador'd.

Such a sense had the inimitable Young of *time*, when he wrote these lines: and oh, that we had all the same striking view of it! Could you not spend that *time* to better advantage, that is spent in plays? You will say indeed, you may as well be at the theatre, as spending your *time* unprofitably, as many others do, viz. in reviling their neighbours, or in frothy, nay, injurious conversation.—But, if others spend theirs unprofitably, is that a sufficient excuse for you, or any reason that you should do so too? Whatever we see in others that is unsuitable to the character of a Christian, we should endeavour carefully to avoid; for he is inexcusable, who condemns any thing in others, and is guilty of the same, or of worse, himself. But consider, how many, when you are in the *playhouse*, are in their *closets*, examining the state of their souls, or looking up to God by prayer! How many are with their *families*, engaged in social worship, or employed in religious and most instructive conversation? Had not this better be the case with you? You may sport with time *now* in the midst of health; but the awful period is coming, when you will see the value of it. Will so many hours, spent in these public diversions, afford a pleasing review? Will it give you any satisfaction, in the near views of eternity, to look back, and consider, how many important duties have been neglected, whilst you have been gratifying a low inclination, among crowds of vain and irreligious persons, at the *playhouse*? Will such a reflection as this, soften a dying pillow, silence the clamours of an awakened conscience, or sooth the horrors of that critical and important hour? Hear what a soul under the force of alarming conviction says upon the subject, hear the reflections of an expiring sinner!—"Oh, the *time* I have foolishly, nay, wickedly spent in the *playhouse*, and in other vain and ensnaring diversions! Oh, that I should have no concern for my dear immortal soul! Oh, how gladly would I call back the hours I have; wasted in such a criminal

and stupid manner! But they are gone, gone never to return; and all before me is Eternity! Oh, what a review! It fills me with shame and confusion; and the pleasures that once so much entertained me, and raised my laughter, now sting and wound me to my very heart."—Would to God that every person, who has any fondness for the diversions of the *stage*, may see them in this light, and be deeply humbled for their spending so much *precious time* in so unprofitable a manner! Upon this account it is highly unsuitable to our character as rational creatures, especially as Christians, to frequent the *theatre*.

III. *Attending upon plays, and other such pleasures, greatly unfits us for the spiritual discharge of duties, and leads to the neglect of them.* If the diversions of the *stage* could be used only as a relaxation of the mind, to unbend our thoughts for the present, that we may be the more fit for engaging in religious duties, and go to them with greater eagerness and delight, there would then be some show of an argument for the pursuit of them. But do these diversions answer this purpose? I leave your consciences to answer, you who have been there. Is it an easy transition from the *playhouse* to the duties of the *family* or the *closet*? Can you with so much composure of mind, and freedom and regularity of thought, read the word of God, and seek him by prayer? Can you expect him with you in spiritual duties, after you have been wasting so much *time* in these *empty pleasures*? Have you gone into your *closet* with the same *quietness of mind*, and met with the presence of God as usual? Oh! be faithful to your souls in this point. Do not smother the truth. Nay, I would charge you, in the name of the Lord, to give conscience its full scope, and let it speak matter of fact. Stand the test then, and answer these questions, if you can:—Are not your minds full of what you heard, when you come away? Do not the *pleasing scenes*, which struck your fancy, follow you into your closet. Is it not oftentimes some days before you can shake off the diverting thought? Have you not found a *shyness to duty* after attending the *stage*? Could you go to God with that *confidence* as before, till you had humbled yourselves before him, and applied afresh to the *blood of sprinkling*? Have you had *time* for the performance of *family* and *closet duties*, after you have been at the *playhouse*, or been till an unseasonable hour at an *assembly*? Oh, the duties that have been curtailed, and often neglected, by attending upon such public diversions! If this then is the case, it manifestly appears, that going to *plays*, and to *pleasures*

of the like kind, is by no means suitable to the profession and practice of Christianity.

IV. *Attending plays and other such diversions, has a particular tendency to set persons against the power and life of religion, and to make them take up with a mere form.* That religion, that will not admit of the pleasures of the *playhouse*, is disregarded by all the admirers of the *stage*. What shall they do, who have had a religious education, and have been followed with repeated convictions? They endeavour by all possible means to satisfy their consciences, that attending *plays* may be *innocently* done, and that it is perfectly consistent with real Christianity. Thus the child, who has been accustomed to family and closet duties, begins to look upon these as unnecessary, and to think a pious parent *too severe*, who is for abridging his children of amusement so *innocent*. The young person, now become gay in his behaviour, and wild in his sentiments, is ready to think a godly minister too stiff and precise, because he faithfully reproves the lovers of pleasure. He cannot think there is so much duty required; so much praying, self-examination, and mortification necessary: and therefore by degrees loses all that regard for religion, and the people of God, he once professed to have, and at last boldly sits in the *seat of the scoffer*. I need not ask you, my friends, whether this is the case or not: You have, I doubt not, known many awful instances of it, and thereby see the evil tendency of *plays*, and other *pleasures* of that kind. If there be any of you, who visit these *houses of pleasure*, let me again appeal to your consciences for the truth of what I say. Let me particularly appeal to you who have had a religious education, but have been led aside by these captivating pleasures. Is not what I have said agreeable to truth? You dare not deny the awful fact; but you fain would smother it. You once discovered a serious disposition; but *plays*, *assemblies*, &c. gave you a disrelish to strict practical religion, and led you to look upon it as unnecessary and burdensome: and now you would fain vindicate your present practices, but you cannot; conscience will at times speak, and remonstrate. How awful, that any should attempt to defend a practice so injurious! Do you ever see any persons attend the *playhouse*, who are growing and flourishing Christians? As soon as they begin to make their appearance there, and to relish the *stage*, and other such *diversions*, they begin to dwindle, and sink into a sad formality. If this then is the case, it clearly shows, how unsuitably attending the *theatre* is to the *profession and practice of Christianity*.

V. *Attending plays and other such diversions is accompanied with the greatest evils.*—This practice is a sad inlet into all manner of sins; it opens a door to the greatest extravagances: to support which, the most desperate measures are often taken, which bring the poor unhappy creature to an ignominious end. The *stage* may boast of thousands and ten thousands it has led captive, and ruined both as to time and eternity. How many lovely youths, who once bid fair for heaven, here lost all their convictions, were introduced into evil company, turned out the greatest debauchees, consumed their substance, destroyed their constitution, broke the hearts of their aged relatives, and by their intemperance and debaucheries lived not half their days! That this is the case, we have too many awful instances to deny; and it is no wonder, when we consider the degeneracy of our natures, and the tendency of *plays* to lead to profaneness in conversation, and promote impurity of thought, by the wanton songs, and filthy jests, and blasphemous speeches, with which many of them are crowded. A youth, who has here lost his religion, becomes an easy prey to the great enemy of souls; for what has he to ballast him? Intoxicated with pleasure, he is like a drunken man, has nothing to prevent his complying with every temptation that is presented before him. Oh, how many, upon a dying bed, have lamented their frequenting the *stage*, and other public pleasures! How many have cursed the day that brought them to a sight of a *play*, and entangled them in such company as proved their ruin!—"Oh, how happy, had I never stepped out of the road I was directed to by my religious relatives! I was guarded against running into such dangerous paths, cautioned of the consequences; but alas. I would not hearken to the tender solicitations of my affectionate friends! I thought I might innocently go; and oh, there my unwary feet were caught! The net was carefully spread, and I was taken! Oh, lament, lament, my soul, the *time*, the *hour* I first gazed upon those pleasing, but destructive scenes! Now am I going into Eternity to give an account of the improvement of it to an infinitely just and holy God; and oh, how awful the view! What can I expect after a life of such irreligion and profaneness!"—Thus many have been led to infidelity and impiety, and will have, it is to be feared, an Eternity to bewail their folly and stupidity.

VI. *For professors to attend plays, and other such entertainments, is to set a bad example.*—Thus our young friend mentions it as being a temptation to him, and as an argument almost sufficient to answer every objection, viz. that many

truly religious persons have, and still do at times attend the *theatre*. An awful consideration this! What, a *Christian* seen at the *playhouse*! It is something indeed amazing! It is no wonder to see an immoral person attending public diversions; one who has no sense of the worth of his soul, and the importance of eternity: but to see a professor of religion, one who is willing to be esteemed a *Christian* indeed, one who perhaps appears at the table of our Lord; to see such a person amidst a crowded assembly at the *theatre*, and to hear him excusing his attendance, by saying, *there is no harm in it*, is something awful! Well may a poor giddy sinner make a bad use of such an example; well may an unsteady youth say, I may certainly now go, when such a person attends. I may now conclude it is not inconsistent with a religious character, and therefore may indulge my inclinations, when an opportunity offers. Oh, see the melancholy consequences and the destructive influence of a bad example! Remember, if *you* go, others will go too. And suppose you could go to the *theatre* innocently; yet many, who are prevailed upon perhaps to go through your example, may be ruined for ever: they cannot withstand the force of those temptations that are before them; therefore a concern for the glory of God, a consideration of the influence of our example, and a regard for others, should keep us from the *playhouse*, and from every *pleasure* that we think may be injurious to the souls of others, even suppose it should not be so to our own.

Thus I have hinted a few things, that are, I apprehend, sufficient to show, that going to the *theatre*, &c. is *unsuitable to the profession and practice of Christianity*. If any amongst you have an inclination to attend the *stage* and other *public pleasures*, and can answer it to God, to yourselves, and to others, that none of these things shall be the consequences, *then go*; but I may venture to say, that the above hints are so near the truth, that none who have frequented public places of pleasure, can deny, if they would faithfully relate their own experience. I would now therefore accompany what I have said with a warm and affectionate address. And,

1. *To masters and heads of families*—particularly, *to those who attend themselves*.—And let me entreat you to consider the bad *example* you are setting before your families. Consider the unhappy use they are like to make of it. No wonder you find them desirous of walking in your steps. To see you frequently setting out for the *theatre*, and to hear you perhaps recommending some of the parts you have seen acted, cannot

but raise in them a curiosity to see the same; and they apprehend they may boldly ask to go, or even take the liberty, if it should be denied. And what can you say to discourage them? You cannot consistently represent the danger of such practices: this would be an argument against your attendance, as well as theirs. How can you forbid them going, or curb an inclination in them to the *theatre*? How can you complain of their extravagancies, or correct them for their being so frequently there? You lead them thither yourselves. You may justly chide *yourselves*, and say, "How can I wonder to see in my children and servants such a desire after the pleasures of the *stage*, when I have done enough to raise it in them? Must I not blame myself for all the gaiety and extravagance of my child? I taught him first to go to a *play*; and see what evils I have hereby introduced into my family! I gave my son a taste for the *playhouse*; and see what are the consequences! He has contracted an acquaintance with those who will be his ruin! How extravagant in his expenses! How is he enfeebling his constitution by intemperance! And what will be the end of all? A tragical one, I fear; and all occasioned by my own folly."

Let me speak a word to such who permit their children and servants to frequent those diversions. And is it so? Do you take no care how your children and servants spend their evenings? Do you never inquire into the company they keep? Never guard them against those houses of pleasure, that are so ruinous to youth? Can you connive at the liberties they take, the hours they spend abroad, and suffer them wantonly to indulge every criminal inclination? Oh, how can you answer it to God, to your own consciences, and to those who intrusted their children and their relations with you? Do you never consider that the souls of your families are committed to your care? Do your consciences never check you, at acting so cruel a part by your children, and so unfaithfully by your servants? Oh how are you helping your families to ruin! Seeing Satan hurrying them on to destruction, and yet never endeavouring to prevent it! Alas, alas! use your authority: let the souls of your families lie with weight upon your minds; and do not suffer one in your house to be pressing on in the road to everlasting destruction, without warning them of the danger, and endeavouring to do all you can to promote their salvation.

2. *I would address myself to professors of religion upon this subject.*—Need I ask, whether any of such a character attend

the *theatre*? This city presents us with too many awful instances of it. See amongst the crowd, that is pressing into the *playhouse*, how many *professors*! They cheerfully mingle with the throng, appear as eager as any in the pursuit of pleasure, and as much delighted with those scenes of vanity. Weep, O my soul, that this is the case! And will not every one who has a zeal for Christ drop a tear, that he should be thus dishonoured?—How shall I address you, ye *cold professors*? Have you any real love to Jesus? Do not your hearts deceive you? Is it surely so? It is a sign that your love is but cold, your faith weak, and that you have but little concern for the glory of God, when you can hurry to such places of profaneness. Let me entreat you to consider, how inconsistent your conduct! How can you answer it to your fellow-christians, how to God, and to your own consciences? Oh, you stumble, you discourage, nay, you harden many. You occasion many reflections upon Christ and his interest. May he not justly complain of you, and say—“What, have you no regard for my glory? What, bear my name, and harden the hearts of so many against me, encourage sin, and bring such a dishonour upon me! Have I done any thing to deserve such coldness, ye *lazy professors*? Consider my love; consider my service: and let a zeal for my glory continually animate your souls, and guard you against every thing that tends to weaken your hands, and to bring any reflections upon me or my cause.”

3. *I would close all with a particular address to young persons.* You are the persons who are more particularly under temptation of being carried away by such bewitching vanities. I would therefore guard you against them. Have any of you attended these *houses of pleasure*? And have you not found them tending to give you looser thoughts of religion than once you had, and to lead you to take greater liberties than you once did? Let this satisfy you, that there is danger in them; and therefore be persuaded carefully to avoid them; and be deeply humbled before God, that you have ever frequented them. I hope you are not determined against conviction. I would set before you the worth of your souls, the importance of eternity; and call you to view the transactions of the great day, when you will receive a sentence of everlasting life, or of everlasting condemnation. Oh, consider how you will answer to an infinite holy God for your spending so much time in such empty pleasures! View the vast assembly that will be gathered! See thousands of thousands at the right-hand of Jesus, and a numberless throng at his left-hand! See

all earthly scenes closing for ever, and the state of each person fixed! Oh, if your minds were once suitably impressed with a sense of these important things, you would soon see the *impropriety and danger of plays*; your minds would be taken up with viewing subjects of infinitely greater importance than these low and perishing things.—Oh, my dear young friends, I cannot leave you, knowing the snares you are exposed to. I would entreat you; I would warn you; I would beseech you. If you have any concern for your souls, if any love for your friends, any desire to honour Christ, let me beseech you to guard against these, and such like *bewitching pleasures*. Oh I cannot leave you. I will try once more to convince and move you. I would beseech you by the love of the *mighty God*. Oh, see him willingly veiling his glory, and coming to rescue poor souls from everlasting misery! Behold him nailed to the accursed tree! Hear him groaning! See him bleeding, dying! And all to redeem precious souls, and to purchase for them the blessings of salvation! And can you now dishonour this Jesus? I would not think so hardly of you. Sure you cannot! In fine, labour to follow Solomon's advice; and, *if sinners entice, consent thou not*. Prov. i. 10. Let me beg you to follow the instructions of your religious friends; and, whilst others are spending their time in the pursuit of pleasure, do you be considering and pursuing the concerns of your souls; you will find it to your unspeakable satisfaction, both in life, and at death. Whilst others are trembling and shuddering upon the brink; for you to stand and look into eternity; for you to be enabled to say with the apostle, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. *We have fought the good fight, we have finished our course, and have kept the faith*; it is impossible to express the pleasure this will give you. If then you have any concern for your peace, living and dying, beg of God to keep you from sin, and to enable you to improve and use your time so as may be for your everlasting advantage. Amen.

CASE XI.

How may a person, who is desirous of following the dictates of Providence in every respect, know the mind and will of God in any particular circumstance, whether temporal or spiritual?

THIS is a question of so large an extent, and of so great importance, that the very sight of it, when it came into my hands, raised in me a great desire to give some solution of it. But, when I looked more attentively into the nature and purport of it, I found it to be a question attended with so much difficulty, and so much nicety in many cases, that I was made almost to doubt whether I should attempt an answer to it or no. However, looking up to the Spirit of God, and into the word of God, for direction in an affair of so much moment, I have ventured upon it; and shall now offer you my thoughts on the subject in the most free and open manner. And although I cannot pretend to give such a particular, or such an extensive answer to it, as the case may require; yet I shall not account my labour in vain, if enabled to exhibit some general rules, which may be helpful to the serious Christian in determining his course of duty. As for those who have not the fear of God before their eyes, they are unconcerned about the matter; they go on in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes, and, at best, advance no higher, than to follow the maxims of human prudence and worldly wisdom. But the truly serious person desires to follow the dictates of Divine Providence in every respect, and is concerned to have the Lord going before him in every step, pointing out his way, and marking out his path for him. He would not, he dares not walk at random, as knowing that the path of duty is the only path of safety and comfort. But how the Christian should know or find out this path, is the great question before us.

Here then it will be necessary first to explain the terms of the question, and then give an answer to it both *negatively* and *positively*.

I. As to the explication of the meaning of the question itself: this is so very needful, that unless you attend to it, you will not be able to see into the nature and suitableness of

the answer. For I apprehend that a great part of the difficulty belonging to the subject arises from a misunderstanding or a misapplication of the terms in which it is conceived; and a clear conception of the meaning of the case proposed, will of itself prevent many mistakes, and will give a general clue for the solution of it.

There is some reason to fear, that, by the mind and will of God in a particular circumstance, many understand something that is absolutely unknown to us, or not to be known by us without a special, fresh revelation; and therefore when they are seeking after, or praying for the knowledge of the divine will, they aim at some peculiar illuminations or impressions, which are neither to be sought after, nor to be depended upon; by which means they are unnecessarily perplexed, and often sadly deluded. We must therefore, in this case, be particularly upon our guard against a species of enthusiasm, which we may be too easily inclined to, and ensnared by.

To prevent mistakes of this nature, let it be observed, that these phrases, the *dictates of providence*, and the *mind or will of God*, though they are very proper to the subject, yet are truly *metaphorical*. Let me therefore express what we mean by the *dictates of providence*; by the *mind and will of God* in a particular circumstance; and by *following these dictates of providence*, or conforming ourselves to this will of God.

1. What is meant by the *dictates or voice of providence*? We are not to imagine that Divine Providence of itself, abstractedly considered, makes known any thing to us; but we must include his word of revelation in the affair. For, in reality, by the voice of providence, we mean the voice of God in his word, concerning our duty as to the particular providences we are attended with. Thus we say that *afflictive providences* have an humbling voice in them; by which, I presume, is meant, that, when we are under afflictive dispensations, the divine word directs and teaches us to submit to, and be humble under, the mighty hand of God. *Prosperous circumstances* call us to thankfulness; i. e. God requires us to be thankful for all his mercies to us; and, when such favours are bestowed upon us, it then becomes our duty to be thankful for them.

A situation of *special temptation or ensnarement* has a voice in it to call us to watchfulness; i. e. it is the mind and will of God, by his word, that we should be peculiarly upon our guard, when providence brings us into such circumstances of trial. These particulars are introduced in this place as familiar instances, to give an idea of what we mean by the *voice of*

providence. And if we clearly conceive the true import of the phrase by these hints, we may proceed, and apply the thought of those circumstances, which more nearly concern the present question, after this manner: Whensoever providence hedges or stops up one way of safety, comfort, or duty, so that we cannot proceed any farther in it, and at the same time opens out another way to go in; then it is evidently the voice or dictate of this providence, that we should leave the former way, and betake ourselves to the other, which appears to be most conducive to our safety, usefulness, or comfort; which is the same as to say that God makes it our duty, by his word, to take such steps as appear most conducive to his glory and our real good, in all circumstances in general; and so, by this general rule, it becomes our duty in the circumstances above supposed, to leave one path of life, and pursue another. And now it will be more easy to learn,

2. What is meant by *the mind and will of God in any particular circumstance.* For it cannot intend any secret locked up in the divine breast, which must be made known by a special revelation; but we must understand by it the revealed will of God, which, by its more general or more particular rules, gives us proper directions for duty, and safety, and usefulness, in any distinct circumstances of life or providence. And therefore,

3. *To follow the dictates of providence,* must mean no other than to act agreeable to the laws of duty, prudence, and safety, in any particular circumstance, according to the directions or determinations of the word and law of God. He follows these dictates who takes a due survey of the situation he is placed in, compares that with the rules of the word which reach the case, and acts accordingly. Such a person neither delays, when providence calls, nor hurries on, before it calls.

Having thus explained the terms of the question, I doubt not but you see that the very explication itself tends to solve many difficulties, and prevent many mistakes, and to give you a general clue for your conduct. Let us now bring down what has been said into the question itself. It supposes that you have some particular affair depending, whether temporal or spiritual, that you are at some loss to determine which way to act, or what method to take; and you desire to know what is the mind and will of God in the present case. Here then let me beg you to recollect in your thoughts, what you do or should mean by this will of God. It certainly means no more,

than for you to be able to understand and judge what is the properest course to be taken, agreeable to the situation you are in, and agreeable to the rules and directions of the divine word in your case. If you mean any more than this, I apprehend you aim at and intrude into those things which are not seen, and which it is not your business to know; for *secret things belong to God*, Deut. xxix. 29.

In order to come at the knowledge of that which it is proper and needful for us to be acquainted with, we are taught by prudence and conscience to make use of, 1. *deliberation*; 2. *consultation*; and 3. *supplication*.

Our *deliberation* should be serious and attentive. We should look around us, and observe what condition and circumstances we are in; should turn our thoughts about every way that we can, in order to view our situation in every point of light in which it appears; and should then compare it with rules of prudence and duty laid before us in the word.

Our *consultation* with friends should be sincere and prudent, with a design to receive what light their conversation may convey; for in most cases it is true, *that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*.

Our *supplication* to the Lord for direction should be serious, earnest, and submissive. Without this, we are in great danger of being led astray, notwithstanding all previous consideration and consultation: for the Lord will be owned and acknowledged; and, if he is neglected, we are guilty of leaning to our own understanding, or depending upon the wisdom of men. We are strictly required to be submissive to divine direction; for *the meek are those that he will guide in judgment, and teach his way*, Ps. xxv. 9. And we have the greatest encouragement to hope for safe conduct in this course; because it is added in the following words, Ps. xxv. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies*. Yea, we have a positive and gracious promise of divine conduct, Ps. xxv. 12. *What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose*. But when you are thus seriously employed in seeking direction from the Lord, take heed that your speech, your thoughts and desires be ordered aright. Let me here ask you, What do you really mean by seeking divine direction? Do you hereby desire any discovery of his secret will, by any unaccountable impulses, or any irrational impressions? If so, I really question whether this very desire is either warrantable or safe, I will tell you briefly what I would mean by such

a practice. When I pray for his guidance and direction in a particular perplexity, I beg of him, that he would lead my thoughts by his Spirit into such a view of the directions of his word, and of the conduct of his providence, that I may from thence be able to judge what is my path of duty; that he would so order affairs in his providence, as to make my way clear to me, upon the principles of duty, prudence, and conscience; and that he would so fix my view, and so incline my heart, as to make me ready and willing to take those steps, or pursue those measures, that may be most conducive to secure the peace of my conscience, to advance the glory of his name, and to promote my real good. Having so distinctly explained and guarded the question, I proceed,

II. To give an answer to it. The question then returns in this form: having made use of proper consideration, consultation, and supplication; *what must we look upon, after all, as marks or tokens of the divine will and pleasure in any particular case that now lies before us?* The reply must be made both *negatively* and *positively*.

1. *Negatively*. We are often very prone to increase our perplexity, or to run into the way of danger, by mistaking the rule, and following those things as guides which have no certainty or safety in them; and this renders it highly necessary that false rules should be laid aside, in order to make way for a clear answer to the important query.

(1.) We should not make our *inclinations* the rule of our conduct; for, through the depravity and vanity of our hearts, we may often find a propensity to that which prudence and conscience, if consulted, would recriminate against, and an aversion to that which the word and providence of God make our duty. In some cases, indeed, it is very necessary to consult the inclination, genius, or capacity, and take it into consideration, while we are weighing and pondering what course of life will be the most suitable to us, or our friends; but, after all, inclination has no standard or rule either of duty or prudence.

(2.) We should not make our particular *frames* the rule of our judgment and determination, because we find ourselves sometimes in a frame for that which is not our present duty; and, when duty and prudence call, our frames may be unsuitable and reluctant. It might not be improper in this place, a little to animadvert upon a method, which some serious persons take, by forming their judgment from the enlargement or contraction of their frames in solemn prayer. If they are

engaged in serious devotions, seeking to the Lord for a particular favour in providence; if they find themselves peculiarly enlarged, they gather from thence, that the favour shall be granted; but, if they are peculiarly contracted, they take it as a token of a divine denial; and so frame their actions according to these views or expectations. But this I apprehend is an erroneous and uncertain rule of judgment: for, although many a time the event may come to pass agreeably to this rule, yet *many* times it has proved just the reverse; and yet if we lay any considerable stress upon these frames, we are in danger of being misled as to the way of duty, and of having our faith and hope shaken and overthrown by an unexpected disappointment. As this rule of judgment is not given us in the word, it is therefore uncertain; and yet we should be ready to acknowledge thus much, that so far as the liberty of our frames excites and encourages us to use proper means, and so far as the contraction of our frames prevents us from being presumptuous, or too forward in our conduct, so far it is a mercy to us that we are thus encouraged or thus cautioned. And it is very likely, that God may sometimes enlarge our hearts in prayer, with a design to excite and encourage us; or contract our hearts, with a design to prevent us from using those means, or taking those steps, which may be detrimental. But still the rule of judgment and duty is to be gathered from the appearances of providence, and the directions of the word.

(3.) We are not to be guided by the bare *form of scripture phrases*. Far, very far, would I be from laying aside the *use* of the holy scriptures in these points; but would only guard against abuses of it. There are some Christians who are fond of using the Bible as if it were a *fortune-book*: when a difficulty in prudence or duty occurs, they will open the Bible at random, and observe what texts meet their eyes first; and, according as the wild imagination applies that passage to the point in question, so they think it their duty to act. This is a very weak and dangerous practice, and a sad abuse of the word of God, applying it to a purpose for which the Holy Ghost never intended it. Others will make a random application of a passage of scripture (which suddenly occurs to, or is strongly impressed upon their minds) to their present case and difficulty; never looking into, or attending to the proper meaning of the text, but straining and applying it to something very foreign from the intention of the Holy Spirit. For instance: if the query be, whether you should follow the practice of a neighbour or friend, and you have those words impressed upon your mind,

Go thou, and do likewise; you are apt from thence assuredly to gather, that it is the mind and will of God you should do as he does. This method of judging concerning prudence and duty is extremely weak, precarious, and dangerous; for it can never be supposed that the Holy Spirit intended these words in the Bible to be thus applied and used at random. But this brings me to observe,

(4.) That we are not to be guided by any *unaccountable impulses and impressions*. There are many who frequently feel such impressions upon their minds, and are inclined to pay a very strict regard unto them. Yea, some carry this point so far, as to make it almost the *only* rule of their judgment, and will not determine any thing, *until they find it in their hearts to do it*, as their phrase is. Others take it for granted, that the divine mind is notified to them by sweet or powerful impressions of some passages of sacred writ:* and there are others who are determined by visionary manifestations, or by the impressions made in dreams, and the interpretations they put upon them. All these things, being of the same general nature, may very justly be considered together. And it is a matter of doubt with many, how far these things are to be regarded or attended to by us: and how we may distinguish any divine impressions of this kind from the delusions of the tempter, or of our own evil hearts. Give me leave here to say, that whoever makes any of these things his *rule and standard*, forsakes the divine word, and nothing tends more to make persons unhappy in themselves, unsteady in their conduct, or more dangerously deluded in their practice, than paying a *random regard* to these impulses, as notifications of the divine will. To take it for granted, that it is our duty to act so or so, because it is impressed upon our minds, or because our dreams bear such an interpretation, or even because a passage of holy writ is applied to our minds in a powerful and unaccountable way; I say, thus to judge, is an

* By these sweet and powerful impressions of scripture phrases or sentences upon the mind, I do not here mean their being set home upon the heart and conscience, agreeable to the true meaning and proper design of the Holy Spirit in them; for, whenever this is the case, it is evident they are very desirable and valuable, as the effect of God's Spirit upon the heart. But I mean such unaccountable, occasional impressions of scripture passages, as are foreign from the proper meaning of the Holy Ghost in them. We are not to esteem these any rule of conduct, nor immediately act according to them, as if notifications of the divine will; for they may be delusive, instead of being directory. But however, it may be granted, that, so far as these *false* impressions excite in our minds those thoughts which are according to scripture *truths*, though not the truth of the passage impressed, so far they may be really useful both in providential and spiritual concerns.

enthusiastical delusion, which ought to be avoided and detested by all sober Christians, as a bold intrusion into the secret will of God, as a withdrawal of heart from the proper rule of duty, as regarding lying vanities, and forsaking our own mercy. But you will say, "Are not some of these impressions divine? Has not many a Christian found himself mercifully led in the proper path by these impulsive methods? Nay, have not some believers been comforted and directed, yea, and some sinners awakened, and brought savingly to Christ, in this impulsive way, by dreams, visions, or powerful impressions of some parts of sacred writ? And, if so, there is certainly some reason to regard them, to desire them, wait for them, and be thankful for them." I would answer, And are not many of them purely enthusiastical, if not diabolical? The question therefore returns, How may we distinguish those impressions that are delusive, enthusiastical, or diabolical, from those that are true and divine? Now here it is natural to observe, that the very putting or admitting this question, supposes and proves, that these impulses cannot be the *standard* of duty, nor of *themselves* indications to us of the mind and will of God; but we must recur to some other rule to *try the spirits whether they be of God*. For which reason they are not to be depended upon; and those who find themselves frequently acted upon in this impulsive way, ought to be extremely upon their guard, lest they are so deceived or deluded, as to place a dependance upon them. It is, doubtless, a mercy and privilege for any to be so impressed, as to be thereby excited or directed into the right path of duty; and whatever impulses quicken us to it, we may be thankful for: but, after all, they must not be accounted the rule or standard of right and wrong. You may therefore take this as a general rule,—That whenever these impressions are such as lead us to depend upon *themselves*, and direct our course according to them absolutely, they are really enthusiastical, or very much to be suspected upon that account. I am obliged therefore to put the matter upon this plain issue; either these impulses excite thoughts and reasonings in our own mind concerning the path of duty, or they do not: if they do not, and have nothing to offer as a reason why we should follow them, but because we find ourselves so excited and impressed, they are then properly enthusiastical; but, if they do awaken our thoughts and concern, and turn our minds to think upon some spiritual or prudential reasons for our conduct, then the thoughts suggested are to be brought to the standard of prudence and duty, and to be determined from thence whether

they are right or wrong. And we may vindicate the promised leadings of God's Spirit, without giving encouragement to enthusiastic pretences, upon this principle, that the Spirit of God has access to our minds, and works upon us so as to lead our thoughts unto the law and testimony, and to direct our minds to such truths of scripture, and such rules of prudence, as are most adapted to direct us in a present difficulty. Let me add,

(5.) We must not make the *event* our rule of judgment. My meaning is this: if we have taken a step conscientiously in the fear of God, and it does not succeed, we need not therefore reflect upon ourselves, as if we had done wrong, but rather submit to God's sovereign providence; and, if we have taken a step carelessly, presumptuously, or without proper reason to vindicate it, and it succeeds beyond our expectation, we should not therefore sooth our consciences, as if we had done right, but rather encourage a thankful admiration that God should deal with us in kindness so contrary to our deserts. But it is high time to come to,

II. The *positive* answer to this interesting question. The Spirit of God by his operations always makes use of, and directs us to the word and providence compared together, in order to open to us the path of duty. So that the general rule for us to judge by is this;—that which evidently appears, after serious deliberation, proper consultation, and earnest supplication, to be impracticable, unlawful, or imprudent, we are to esteem *not to be* the mind and will of God in the case; and whatever appears to be proper duty, true prudence, or real necessity, that we should esteem *to be his will*. To render this general rule familiar and easy, I would conclude with the application of it to some extensive particulars.

1. Unless something different from your present situation offers itself to your serious consideration, you are not to be desirous of changing your state, except in such cases as the following: Perhaps providence begins to render your present situation very *uncomfortable*, and really *unprofitable* to yourselves or others; or makes your continuance in it truly impracticable. If so, we may assuredly gather, that we should look out after, and seek for some alteration. Or perhaps, though your present condition may be easy and profitable, yet there may be such changes attending it, as to render it *unlawful* for you to continue; you cannot remain in this business or place any longer, without making a breach upon your conscience, without violating the divine law, without omitting some incum-

bent duty, or depriving yourselves of some necessary privilege, or being exposed to the prevailing power of some sin or temptation. Whenever your situation appears such as to render it impossible for you to abide in it without sustaining such sad consequences, you may assuredly gather, that it is now the will of God that you should immediately look out for some other place or employment. You are not to be given to change; but in such cases as these, we are warranted and required by prudence and duty, to change our state or circumstance, and seek out after something else, whether there be any immediate proposal of another nature, or no.

2. When an alteration of circumstance is proposed to you, or providence lays two or more things before your eyes; to choose whether to continue where you are, or to enter upon a different situation; or of two different situations, which of them to accept; endeavour to take a distinct view of each proposed case so far as it comes within the compass of your knowledge; compare them with one another, and with the condition of yourselves or families, &c. and then determine by such maxims as these,—Of *two natural evils*, choose the least: this is a plain rule in prudence. Of *two moral evils*, choose neither; but fly from both upon every consideration, nor let your conscience be soothed or silenced with that sad principle, Rom. iii. 8. *Let us do evil, that good may come of it*; for their condemnation is just who do so, let their consciences be ever so easy or pacified about it. *Determine always on the safest side in affairs of conscience*; and, while your minds scruple the lawfulness of any thing, and you can with a safe conscience abstain from it, duty requires you should abstain: for he that thus doubteth, is self-condemned if he ventures upon it, because he doth it not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin. *Happy is the man that condemneth not himself in the thing that he alloweth*, Rom. xiv. 22.

Of *two moral or spiritual good things*, choose the greatest, if you have capacity and opportunity for it; for duty requires us to be ready to every good word and work. That situation wherein you can do and receive the greatest real good to yourselves or others; that situation wherein you can best promote the glory of God, and serve your generation according to his will, should be embraced by you.

Of *two natural good things*, you are not always to choose the greatest; but fix upon that, even though it be the least, that appears best to subserve the real and spiritual good of yourselves and others. Do not set your eye and heart upon worldly riches,

honours, or pleasures: *for they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition, 1 Tim. vi. 9.* These things are to be sought after only in a strict subserviency to real and spiritual advantages; for which reason you must take special care about your motives and views in affairs of this kind. For want of this guard upon yourselves, you will be in danger of embracing any thing that is shining and promising to an eye of sense, to the loss and detriment of those things that alone can make you truly happy, comfortable, and useful.

3. When, upon due consideration, nothing appears in the necessity of the case, or the pointings of providence to make your way clear; do not hurry providence; but remain in a state of suspense, or abide where you are; waiting upon the Lord in the way of prayer, and waiting for the Lord in the way of his providence; and you need not fear, but that, as soon as it is needful for you to determine, God will by his providence either hedge up the wrong way, by making it impracticable, uncomfortable, unprofitable, or imprudent to you, and shut you up into his chosen way: or else he will soon give you such a turn in affairs as shall turn the scale; so that conscience, prudence, or a desire of usefulness will be sufficient to determine you, without your making any felt impressions, or any supposed revelations, the rule of your conduct.

4. I would lay before you the following general rules, which suit to every case, and so conclude. *In all cases* let it be your perpetual concern to keep as much as possible out of the way of temptation to omit any duty, or commit any sin. Let the sixth petition of the Lord's prayer be always yours, and act accordingly; *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

In all cases take the word of God for your rule: See whether there be any thing in it, which, according to its proper meaning, suits your case; whether its rules of duty and its prudential maxims will not help and direct you in deciding the point. Compare the declarations of the word with the dispensations of providence towards you; and thence learn what the Lord requires of you in your present circumstance. Be earnest with God, that his Spirit would bring such texts or truths to your mind, as may be proper to direct you; and that he would give you a true insight into them, and help your thoughts to apply them to your case, that you might rightly judge upon the principles of prudence and conscience. And thus you will

experimentally prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God; and will find the sacred oracles to be a *light to your feet, and a lamp to your path.*

In all cases keep up a reverence for the word and providence of God upon your hearts. Whatever *these* render unlawful or imprudent, look upon it to be against His will, and accordingly avoid it; and what *these* render necessary from conscience and prudence, esteem it agreeable to his will, and comply with it accordingly; not merely as your choice, nor as invented by your prudence; but as the will of the Lord himself.

In all cases have a steady eye to his glory. Let this be the grand view of your minds, the grand principle of your conduct, and the grand spring of your actions. And if his glory and your real spiritual good lie uppermost in your minds, it will be a most useful, valuable, and effectual directory to your actions. Lay to heart that excellent caution, direction, and encouragement, which are found together in Prov. iii. 5, 6. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him; acknowledge his word by consulting it, his hand of providence by observing it, his wisdom by admiring it, his sovereignty by acquiescing in it, his faithfulness by relying on it, and his kindness by being thankful for it: and he shall direct thy paths.*

Finally, *In every case* let it be your great concern and desire to behold God in covenant, as managing every providential circumstance in subserviency to his gracious purposes in Christ Jesus. He, as a covenant God, has committed the management of the kingdom of providence, as well as of grace, into the hands, the faithful, powerful, and gracious hands, of our exalted Redeemer: for Christ *has all the power both in heaven and earth*; and this power is given him on purpose *that he should give eternal life to as many as were given him.* Beholding every circumstance as thus conducted by the Lord Jesus, in pursuance of the designs of the everlasting covenant, will alleviate every trial, will sweeten every cross, and add a double sweetness to every providential favour. If providence renders our present situation uncomfortable, a sight of God's love in Christ will make us contented till there be an opening for our escape. If providence renders our abiding in our present state impracticable or unlawful, the viewing Jesus Christ at the helm of all affairs will enable us boldly to venture out in his name and strength into any unknown or rugged path, which necessity or duty may drive us into. When two different situations are offered to our choice; here is now a trial of our

love to God in Christ; for the head of the church brings his people into such a state of suspense, in order to try what influence our love to his name, our regard to his word, and our view to his honour, will have upon the deciding our conduct. And, if we could always view such circumstances in providence as trials of our choice, this very thought would be a great means of quickening and directing our way. If providence keeps us for a time in such a state of suspense, we should look upon this as a trial of our patience, to see whether we can wait upon the Lord, and believe in his salvation.

Thus, whatever our circumstances are, a real belief of God's love and faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ, and a realizing view of providence as in his hands, will be found of eminent service to keep us close to our duty, and to keep us from entering into any forbidden path; to keep our view upon the honour of Christ, and to keep our faith from failing, our patience from being exhausted, and our souls from misinterpreting and misimproving the dispensations of providence towards us.

CASE XII.

Should not a person, who is not comfortably persuaded of his being a real Christian, abstain from the ordinance of the Lord's supper, lest he should eat and drink damnation to himself?—And, what method must that person take to satisfy a Church of Christ of his being a real Christian, who cannot relate any particular experience of the dealings of God with his soul?

THESE questions are of great importance, and therefore deserve a distinct consideration. They were occasioned by two letters sent to me, one of which is as follows:

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I SHOULD be glad you would resolve the following case, as soon as opportunity will permit.—A person has some hopes he has experienced a real saving change, and is therefore

desirous of waiting upon Christ at his table: but is greatly discouraged, from a view of what the Apostle says upon this subject, 1 Cor. xi. 27—29. This passage has occasioned the following thoughts, viz. If he has really experienced a saving change, he shall be saved, whether he is a partaker of this ordinance or not: but, on the other hand, if he should be deceived with regard to the state of his soul, he then must *eat and drink damnation to himself*, and so be excluded from even any future hopes of being saved at all. What therefore must he do in these circumstances?"

THIS short letter expresses the sentiments of many a Christian. The person who wrote it, is desirous of attending the ordinance of the *Lord's supper*, but is not satisfied that he is a child of God, and is therefore afraid of *eating and drinking damnation to himself*. The word *damnation* fills him with a peculiar awe, and sets his soul a trembling—"Is this the consequence?" says he. "Oh! what shall I do: How must I act? Must I attend in these circumstances, when I know not but my soul may be ruined for ever? Is it not rather my duty to abstain from the ordinance, as it is not absolutely necessary to my salvation? Here are two things that present themselves before me: 1. I may be saved, and yet not attend at the *Lord's table*. 2. I am not sure but on attending I may eat and drink *damnation to myself*. What therefore must I do?"—Thus we see the difficulty this person is under: to endeavour to remove which, and to quicken all that love our Lord Jesus Christ to the cheerful discharge of their duty, I would.

1. *Inquire whether a person may not satisfy himself in abstaining from the Lord's supper, because it is not a saving ordinance?* This is too often pleaded as an excuse by those who come not to the table: but it will appear weak, as well as ungrateful, if we consider these two things—

1. *Though the Lord's supper is not a saving, yet it is a useful ordinance.* A person may be saved, who never appeared at the *Lord's table*. This consideration should be an encouragement to those, who are deprived by the providence of God of the opportunity: but it should be no encouragement to negligence, when we are called to attend. If it is not necessary to the being of a Christian, it is to his well-being. Some make a Saviour of it: they are never easy, till they have had this ordinance administered unto them; as if the bare receiving it was sufficient to wipe away every sin, and to entitle a person at once to the salvation of Christ. Others slight and

neglect it. How happy to be kept from these two extremes! This ordinance was not designed to be a standing means of awakening and converting sinners, but it was, of carrying on the work of grace in the heart, and of training up the soul for heaven. Particularly, it is designed to give us a greater hatred of sin, and fill our souls with a deeper humiliation for it. And this it does, as it exhibits all the riches of a Redeemer's love, all the glories of his cross. A view of these, under the influences of the Spirit, powerfully, though sweetly, works upon an ingenuous mind, and comes with an energy that nothing can withstand.—“ Oh, says the Christian, the hatefulness of sin! Canst thou love it, O my soul? Canst thou fondly embrace and pursue it? O melt, melt, my hard heart! Why dost thou not move to see thy pierced Saviour, a Saviour pierced for thee, pierced by thee? Dost thou not rise with resentment against the cruel and obstinate Jews, who thus put the Son of God to a painful and ignominious death? But oh, stop thy resentment against them, and look at home! Thy sins, O my soul, were the murderers of thy Lord! These were the nails that fastened him to the *accursed tree*. These the spear that wounded his *side*, that covered his body with a *bloody sweat*, and prepared the *bitter cup* he drank! O weep, mourn, O my soul! Be ever humble under a sense of sin, and dishonour not that Jesus who loved thee and gave himself for thee!”

Again, *This ordinance tends to enliven and strengthen our graces, and to bring us into a greater conformity to God.* When we are sitting and viewing the *matchless love* of Christ, it tends to fasten the deepest convictions of our obligations to him upon our minds, and to increase our love to him. It tends to strengthen our faith in him, under a sense of our guilt and unworthiness, to reconcile us to every difficulty, to quicken us when slothful, to restore us when wandering, to wean our affections from earthly things, and carry on the work of God in the soul. “ Oh, says the Christian, see what *love*! And shall I loiter thus? Shall I be so cold to Jesus? Oh, why does not the fire burn within me? Why so slothful? Up, O my soul! and let thy Redeemer's glory be ever thy concern, as thy everlasting salvation was his.”

Again, *This ordinance tends greatly to promote our spiritual comfort.* Here, behold a *Father's love*! He parts with his *only-begotten Son*, and delivers him up to an *accursed death* for us! Here see the *Saviour's heart*, how much it is set upon our salvation! View here the virtue, the glory of an infinitely

atoning sacrifice! See justice sheathing its awful sword, death and hell vanquished, the uttermost farthing paid, and all the blessings of salvation fully purchased! Oh, here behold a righteousness provided, the promises confirmed, and grace and glory both secured to every *chosen vessel*! How animating, how comforting such a view!—"O how glorious, says the Christian. See, O my soul, thy *Saviour's* love! And wilt thou any more distrust him? View the triumphs of the cross! And wilt thou any longer be afraid? Oh, what a foundation is here laid for a strong faith, and a lively hope!"

Again, *This ordinance tends to increase our love to one another.* It is a cementing ordinance. It cannot but raise in us a mutual affection, whilst we view each other as purchased by the same blood, members of the same body, and children of the same family.—Thus then, though it may not be absolutely necessary to our salvation to wait upon Christ at his *table*, yet it is necessary to our growth in grace, our greater comfort here, and fitness for a better world; and therefore it is our duty and privilege to appear amongst his people there. But,

2. *Christ himself instituted this ordinance, and invites his followers to wait upon him here.* What our Lord said to his disciples, he says also to us in this distant age, *Do this in remembrance of me.* 1 Cor. ii. 24. And where is the expression of our love, where our gratitude, if we refuse to obey?—"Oh, says the soul, has my Redeemer commanded those that love him to wait upon him here? This *command* is enough for me, I cannot but obey. Who can resist his love? Who can hear the compassionate Jesus, who came and suffered death; who can hear him inviting his dear followers to his table, and say, *I will not come, for I may be saved without it?* How disingenuous is this?"—What, has he who loved us so as to give himself for us, called us? And will ye not obey his call, because you may get safe to a better world, and yet never attend at this ordinance? Where is your concern to honour your Redeemer?—These hints, I hope, are sufficient to show the weakness of this argument, the Christian is so ready to make use of, for his neglect of this institution, and to stir him up to a cheerful and diligent discharge of his duty, that he may glorify his once dead, but now exalted *Saviour*, and gain some saving advantage to his own soul. I now proceed,

II. *To consider the other objection which our friend makes to his waiting upon Christ in this ordinance, viz. a fear lest he should eat and drink damnation to himself.* This objection seems to lie in your mind, my dear Christian friend, thus—

“ If I should eat and drink unworthily, I shall eat and drink damnation to myself; and I am not sure that this will not be the case; therefore, shall I attend, when the consequences may be so awful? Oh, that word *damnation*, it strikes me with a peculiar terror!”—Thus the greatest stress appears to be laid upon this alarming word. If then I can set this circumstance in such a light, as to remove these distressing fears, I hope the case will be in some measure resolved. That this may be done, I would consider, *What that unworthy eating and drinking is, which is brought in as the cause of this damnation, and then, the damnation itself.*

First, *Let us inquire what it is to eat and drink unworthily.* He that does so, attends upon this ordinance in a manner, and with ends and views different from those for which it was appointed. This was the case with the Corinthians, 1 Cor. xi. 18—22. They had not the glory of Christ in view, when they met together to administer this ordinance. They fell into contentions and confusions, so that there could not be that harmony which was necessary to be found in a church sitting down together at the *Lord's table*. They came not to view the *body and blood of Christ*, or to remember his matchless love, but to satisfy their craving appetites, and refresh animal nature; and they were so disorderly, that some even ate and drank to an excess, whilst others had not enough to satisfy their hunger. Thus we see what it is *to eat and drink unworthily*, viz. when we attend in an irreverent, disorderly, and carnal manner, and for ends different from those for which the ordinance was appointed by our Lord; when we prostitute it to some earthly purposes, and have no regard to the frame of soul in which we attend, or to the great ends to be answered by it.

Secondly, *Let us now consider what this damnation is.* And,

1. *Taking the word in the most awful sense, as signifying eternal condemnation, it should not deter us from waiting upon Christ in this ordinance.* In this case it does not signify that there is no forgiveness after an *unworthy receiving*. Many have sat down at the table of the Lord, who were enemies to him, and yet have afterwards been the triumph of sovereign grace. Thus, ye timorous souls, who are so often distressed with a view of this *awful word*, and entertain from hence such solemn thoughts of this ordinance, see here is nothing to affright you from this, any more than from any other sacred institution. You may as well not read, hear, or pray; because, if these are not the means of your *salvation*, the consequence

will be your *damnation*. Doubtless, all the ordinances the impenitent sinner has attended upon, will appear against him, and increase his misery in the infernal regions. But this should not drive us from the house of God, but fill us with a serious concern that our waiting upon God may be effectual to bring our souls to Jesus Christ. But,

2. *The word damnation is to be taken in a softer sense. As,*

(1.) *It signifies temporal judgments or afflictions, Luke xxiii. 40. and xxiv. 20. 1 Pet. iv. 17. Thus the Apostle explains it, when he adds in the next verse, For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. As if he had said, as you come to the table of the Lord in so disorderly a manner, and have perverted the end and design of this ordinance; so God has manifested his displeasure, by laying his hand upon you, insomuch that many of you are in an unhealthy, feeble, and sickly condition, and many have been removed out of time into eternity. Thus this word damnation carries nothing frightful in it.*

(2.) *It signifies here such afflictions as are a means of our spiritual good. Thus says the Apostle, v. 32. But, when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world.—That is, when we are thus under outward afflictions, we are mercifully chastened and gently corrected of God, that we may not continue prostituting his sacred ordinances to the vilest purposes, and so be condemned with the world; but that we may be convinced, humbled, and reclaimed. Thus these considerations take every frightful idea from the mind, viewing this formidable word, and consequently tend to remove those distresses and discouragements occasioned by it.*

Some perhaps may say, This is encouraging indeed! You say, a person's *unworthy receiving* does not expose him to eternal damnation, but only brings upon him a few temporal afflictions, which are in reality blessings: so that by this you give encouragement to persons to come and trifle with this *sacred ordinance*.—God forbid, that I should have such a view as this! This, I am certain, is far from being the conclusion a *real* Christian will draw from what has been said. *To do evil, that good may come*, is not the character of a true follower of Jesus. Because God only gently chastises and corrects our negligence and slothfulness, and makes these corrections a means of our spiritual good, shall we therefore rush boldly upon this *ordinance*? No. What has been said only tends to remove the distressing fears of the *Christian* about the word

damnation, and to encourage *him* to come to the table of his Lord; and does not promote a carelessness of spirit, nor will have this influence upon a mind under the power of gospel truths.

Come then, ye fearful souls, who start at the mention of this ordinance. Do you not love Jesus? Have you not made choice of him as your *Saviour*? Would you not love him more, and be brought into a greater conformity to him? *You* are the very persons Christ invites. Would you prostitute this ordinance to any vile earthly purpose? Would you *eat* and *drink* in a disorderly and indecent manner? No. You would come to remember the love of a *dying Redeemer*, and to view all that is here exhibited. You would come to be quickened, to behold a *suffering Saviour*, to admire the riches of distinguishing grace, in the sacrifice of the *Son of God*; but you are afraid you are unworthy, unfit persons to make such an approach to God, and be indulged with such a privilege. If it be thus with you, do not be discouraged. Venture near your *Redeemer*. Come humbly to view your *expiring Lord*, and to plead and rest upon his atoning sacrifice; and you will be far from *eating and drinking damnation to yourselves*. If you were to come for some selfish ends, as the way to worldly advancement or profit, and to pay no regard to the *body and blood* of a Saviour, you might have reason to conclude you were *unworthy receivers*. But, if you have an humble sense of your sinfulness; if you desire to come, *looking to Jesus*, that you may be strengthened, sanctified, and quickened; you need not be afraid, but come with liberty and cheerfulness. He that has invited you, will make you welcome, and carry on his work in you by all the ordinances he has appointed.

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the first question.

Since I received this, the second question was sent me, which I thought not improper to add here:—

“A person looks upon it as his duty to wait upon Christ in this ordinance; but the church with whom he would walk, require him to give an account of the dealings of God with his soul. As he cannot relate any particular experience of this, so he wants to know what he must do in this difficulty.”

This, you see, is a general question, and leaves us at a loss to know wherein the particular difficulty of this person lies. I shall therefore endeavour to state in it two or three different views, and then show what a person must do to satisfy a church in such circumstances.

You are desirous of waiting upon Christ in all the *ordinances* of his house; but you cannot relate any experience of God's dealings with you, so as to give the *church* satisfaction in admitting you to the enjoyment of such a privilege. *Perhaps you mean by this that you cannot relate the particular time and circumstances of your conversion.* This was the case with many of those happy souls, who are now standing before the throne of God; and I doubt not, but it is thus with many of those of whom the churches of Christ are composed here. Some God sanctifies from the womb; in others, the change, though effectually made, yet is done imperceptibly. To inquire of such an account of their conversion, or to refuse them because they are incapable of giving it, is what no church of Christ has a right to do, and therefore should be no stumbling to you.

Again, *Perhaps you have had no extraordinary remarkable circumstances in the course of your experience, to relate to the church; and this may therefore involve you in some difficulty.* God does not deal with all his people in the same way. Some are led smoothly and silently on from step to step. They are savingly enlightened, and brought to Jesus, are carried on through the divine life, and get safe to glory, without any noise or any thing very remarkable in their experience. They appear to be almost always the same, and yet go on from strength to strength. This may be your case, my friend. Others can give an account of *great distresses, great consolations and enjoyments, great meltings of soul in ordinances and duties, &c.* And because you cannot do the same, you are afraid you have no real experience of renewing grace. You have but very little to say, and that to no purpose, in your own apprehensions. But consider those accounts are not always genuine, that appear to be the most *striking*; nor do those always turn out eminent Christians, who are *so long* and *so circumstantial* in their declarations.—But your question returns—*What must you do in your present case?*

1. *If you cannot remember the time and circumstances of your conversion, and how the work has been carried on, inquire into the evidences you can give of a change, and relate them to the church.* You know, my friend, whether you have made a practice of sinning or not; whether sin has been the object of your delight. If this has been the case, you have no experience of the grace of God. But, if you hope it has been your concern to hate sin, to have your corruptions subdued, and to have your heart cleansed from those secret evils which have appeared detestable to you, and have caused you daily to

mourn before God; if you have strove and prayed against them, and longed for deliverance from them; you have a comfortable evidence of your being a Christian indeed.

Again, *Have you been diligent in the use of those means God has appointed?* And what are your views herein? Is it to atone for sins you have committed, to establish a righteousness to justify you before God, or to answer some selfish purposes? You have then no reason to conclude that you are a Christian. But, if it has been out of obedience to the command of God, to meet with him, to feel the quickening, sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and to be fitted more for heaven, this is another evidence of your having received the grace of God.

Again, *Is Christ precious to you?* Have you committed your soul, so far as you know yourself, into his hands? Do you see a suitableness in all his characters? In fine, is he your all and in all? Never say then that you have no saving experience; for what is this?—Go, my friend, and tell the church, that though you are not able to fill up a sheet with a long detail of remarkable circumstances, yet you hope you see yourself guilty, you hate sin, have fled for refuge to Jesus the Mediator, and have left your soul with him; that he is precious to you, you have taken him for your Lord, your portion, your all, and desire to bear his image, and to live to his glory. Is not this enough to give satisfaction?—But perhaps you cannot positively say, this is the case with you. You are under great fears, lest your heart should deceive you.—Declare your fears then, as well as your hopes, and leave your case to the decision of the church, praying that they may be guided in their duty towards you.

2. *Examine the present frame of your soul with a regard to this ordinance.* You say, you have no account to give of God's dealings with you, and yet you are convinced that it is your duty to wait upon Christ at his *table*. Now, if you have no real experience of the grace of God, you have no proper claim to this privilege. I would ask you therefore, and would beg you to ask yourself, Whence it is that you are satisfied it is your duty? A due examination of this will, in some measure, lay before you the ends you have in view in desiring to attend this solemn institution, and be a means of furnishing you with something to say to the church to direct them as to your admission amongst them. Do you apprehend then it is the duty of every common professor, and therefore yours, to appear at the Lord's *table*? If this is all we have to say, we are

guided by a blind and ignorant zeal. But further, are you desirous of coming to this *ordinance*, as you will be hereby more peculiarly entitled to the divine favour, or that it will gain you reputation amongst those you converse with? This shows you how much you are acquainted with the nature of the ordinance, and the gospel method of salvation, and that it is far from being your duty to attend. I would hope better things of you, my friend. But whence is it then, that you see it your duty? Have you any reason to hope that you have given up yourself to Jesus Christ, and do you see your presence at the *table* necessary to testify your love publicly to him? Do you look upon it as useful, to quicken, strengthen, and comfort your soul? Do you see any excellency in it, as being peculiarly adapted, and made effectual, by the Spirit, to crucify our lusts and corruptions, to enliven our graces, to kindle a fire of love to Jesus, and help to keep alive a sense of our obligations to him? In fine, do you desire to come here, that you may view a crucified *Saviour*, feel the influences of his love more on your heart, and be engaged to a more lively obedience? Do you desire to come as a miserable, guilty, naked creature to Christ, as exhibited in this ordinance, to plead his sacrifice, and to lie at the foot of his cross mourning for your sins? These are views suitable to this institution, show that you are a Christian indeed, that you have a real experience, and that you have a right to all the privileges of God's house. To sum up all, if this is the case with you, God has been manifesting himself to your soul, as he does not to the world, and you have reason to be abundantly satisfied. Go then, and tell the church what you have seen, what you have felt, what is your present frame, what the foundation of your hopes, and what you trust, what your desires, your ends and views are; and all this, I doubt not, will appear to them as a sufficient evidence of a work of grace in your heart, and therefore of your right to all the ordinances God has appointed.

CASE XIII.

How may we distinguish the suggestions of Satan from the corruptions of our own hearts ?

THIS question is taken into consideration in consequence of a letter lately received, wherein it was put almost word for word. And certainly it is of great importance, that a question of this nature should be seriously and solidly answered, in order to prevent some very uncomfortable, or very delusive mistakes, which different persons are apt to run into. For there are some, who awfully deceive themselves by casting all their sinfulness from themselves, and charging it upon the devil; while there are others who frequently distress themselves unnecessarily, by laying to their own charge all the evil which they feel in themselves. The unrenewed person is most apt to run into the former mistake, while the serious Christian is most ready to indulge the latter. Those who know not the plague and corruption of their own hearts, are certainly in great danger of deluding themselves; while those who see their own sinfulness and corruption are frequently under a temptation to distress themselves. The carnally secure person, when he has been carried into some enormity which galls his conscience, or damages his reputation, is strongly inclined to seek after all manner of excuses for himself; and among the many methods which the pride and corruption of his heart take, this is one, namely, to charge the fault upon Satan, in order to discharge himself from it, and ease his mind under the guilt of it. But surely this is a sad way of acting; and we have reason to think that the devil is verily innocent of many of those things which are laid to his charge. But we find the serious soul is of a contrary disposition: knowing himself to have all manner of sin in him, he is therefore apt to charge himself with almost every thing: from whence it appears, that it is one artifice of the devil to suggest evil thoughts, and then to persuade the gracious person that he is chargeable with them; and, if he can prevail upon the poor believer to take those charges home to himself, this produces the most melancholy distress, and has a tendency to drive him to despair. And I doubt not, but many gracious persons have been brought almost to the very borders of desperation, by being inclined to charge them-

selves with what was not properly their sin, but was only their affliction.

The foregoing thoughts make it appear very evident, that this question should be attended to with great diligence. And if I can be a means of giving a satisfactory solution to the important query, it may, by the blessing of God, be a happy means of rousing the carnally secure, and of comforting the distressed believer.

In order therefore to introduce a proper answer to this question, it will be needful to premise two or three things.

1. *That our own hearts can tempt us to the worst of sins, even without the concurrence of the devil.* There is nothing too bad, vile, or abominable, for our corrupt hearts to suggest to us; for our Saviour tells us, that *out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, blasphemies, and the like*, Matt. xv. 19. And the Apostle James confirms this awful truth, by telling us, Jas. i. 14, 15. *That every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* So that there is great need to be attentive to, and watchful against, the first risings of our depraved nature.

2. *That Satan may suggest evil thoughts to us, even without the concurrence of our own hearts.* This was indubitably the case with our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though perfectly free from sin, was tempted to the vilest iniquity in the wilderness, as is recorded Matt. iv. 3—10. And thus it was likewise with respect to our mother Eve, when Satan made his first attack upon her. And I doubt not but this hath been the case with many true believers, as will be made evident in the sequel of this discourse.

3. *That sometimes both Satan and our own hearts concur to produce the same evil thoughts within us.* Sometimes our own corrupt hearts are first in the sin; and then we may be said to tempt the devil to tempt us. Thus it was with the Corinthian converts, 2 Cor. xi. 3. *I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* For we find that these Corinthians had been preferring one gospel minister to another, by regarding the oratory of speech, and by having itching ears. This, it is evident, was their own fault; and from hence we find, that Satan takes a handle to draw them off from the true simplicity of the gospel. At other times Satan is first in the evil, by suggesting wicked thoughts to the mind, which are suited to our nature and corrupt disposition. He takes advantage of our circumstances and tempers, and

then our hearts readily fall in with the suggestion; and so we are beguiled and betrayed. And in many cases, Satan and corruption so concur together, that it is difficult to know which is first, or which has the greatest influence unto the sin committed, or the corruption indulged.

But I apprehend that by the following rules we may in some measure know, when Satan has the chief or only hand in the temptation.

1. When the temptation is *unnatural*, or contrary to the general bias or temper of our minds. We know that every person has a disposition to some sin, more than others; and this is the sin which most easily besets us, as it arises from our natural temper. Now observe, when a temptation falls in with this disposition, it is difficult to know whether it arises from Satan, or ourselves; but sometimes persons are tempted to what is directly contrary to this general bias. In the former case, we ought to be very cautious, lest Satan should get advantage of us, and we be ignorant of it: but, in the latter case, it is very evident, the temptation must be chiefly, or only, from the devil. We have a remarkable proof of this in Peter, who was rather inclined to an *overheated zeal* for Christ and his cause; and yet we find him betrayed into the contrary sin, namely, the *most abject cowardice*: which we find expressly ascribed to Satan, Luke xvii. 31. *Satan hath desired to sift you as wheat.*

2. When the temptation is *opposite* to the present frame of the mind, then there is reason to think that Satan has a hand in it. The soul of a believer, we know, is in very different frames, at different seasons; being sometimes more carnal, and at other times more spiritual; sometimes more comfortable, and at other times, more dejected. Now, if a temptation falls in with the present temper of our minds, it is very likely our own hearts have the chief agency in it. For instance: if when we are in a comfortable frame, we are tempted to presumption, or, if in a dejected frame, we are tempted to despair. Not but that Satan may have a great influence even in this case, though more undiscernable; as we see in the Corinthian church, where we find that the church was brought into an utter detestation of the sin of the incestuous person: but Satan takes advantage from hence to drive them into extremes, to swallow up the excommunicated person with overmuch sorrow; which is ascribed to the devil, 2 Cor. ii. 11. *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.* On the contrary, it is very apparent, that Satan has the chief hand

in the temptation that runs counter to our present frame. For instance: if profane thoughts are injected into the mind, when we are in a devout frame; or if presumptuous thoughts come in, while we are in a disconsolate frame; or despairing thoughts are injected, when our minds are in a comfortable and spiritual frame. In either of these cases, it seems evident, from the nature of the thing, that Satan has the chief influence.

3. When the temptation itself is *irrational*, being contrary to whatever we could imagine our minds would suggest to us; here is reason to think that Satan hath the chief agency. As supposing a serious Christian is tempted to disbelieve the Bible, or to call in question the very being of a God, or is hurried on towards some unnatural crimes, such circumstances as these are plain intimations, that the cause is rather the temptation of Satan, than our own corruptions.

4. When the temptation is *detested* in its first rising or appearance, it is a sign Satan has the chief hand therein. For when our heart tempts us to any thing, the temptation is attended with a secret delight at its first rising, because it is suited to our natures and wills; and we cannot but feel a pleasure in the suggestion itself, because it proceeds from ourselves. But when an injected thought is abominable in our sight, and detestable to our souls, at its first appearance, and is an affliction and burden, rather than a gratification; this is an indication that it comes from Satan. As in the case of our mother Eve; who, though she was at length overcome by the temptation, yet at its first appearance her heart disliked and rejected it. And it is a comfortable reflection to remember, that while this detestation remains, it is a sign that nothing in it is to be laid to our charge.

5. When the temptation is *violent*, it is another indication of Satan's agency. We are perhaps hurried on with a kind of impetuosity, and urged to commit a sin in the utmost haste. The temptation says, "You must do this," and the suggestion will not allow us time to think, but drives us on, *nolens, volens*, into the iniquity. And what can we judge from such an experience as this, but that we are under some evil influence from the wicked one?

Further, perhaps the suggestion pursues us from day to day; we want to get rid of it; we strive, we pray against it, but still it follows us, and will not take a denial; but is forcing, rather than persuading us into the abomination tempted to; this likewise is another plain indication of Satan's agency.

I would finish these remarks with a particular thought, that

reaches to all the foregoing heads, and which, from the nature of the thing, appears to be an evidence of Satan's influence; and that is, the temptations being *external*, or from without. And here I must desire every one to look distinctly into his own experience, to find out the difference between what proceeds from *within*, and what comes from *without*. You may easily know in what manner your own thoughts usually arise; you may, as it were, feel them coming forth from your own hearts; and so by this inward feeling they appear to be from within. But at other times the thoughts seem to be produced from an impression upon you; they are darted into your minds, rather than proceed from them. This I must leave to every one's attentive observation of himself; hoping, that by a frequent inquiry you may be able, from your own experience, to distinguish the one from the other. And if you have clear reason to think that the evil thoughts are injected into, and not produced from your minds, you may safely ascribe them to the agency of Satan. For he has not an immediate access to our hearts, but can only work upon the imagination, and so dart, or suggest thoughts to the mind.

Having thus endeavoured to give as clear and as scriptural an account as I can of this intricate matter, let me conclude with a few advices and directions.

1. *Take heed and do not charge all upon Satan.* This is too common a case, especially among those that have not the fear of God before their eyes. When I hear persons continually casting the fault of their sins upon the devil's temptations and suggestions, I cannot but suspect that such are awfully ignorant of themselves, have never yet known the corruptions of their own hearts, nor seen the excellency of Jesus Christ. But if persons are inclined seriously and conscientiously to take the whole fault upon themselves, this is an error on the right hand; for it is a great sign of a tender conscience to take too much to ourselves, rather than too little. And doubtless every one that has truly seen the plague, deceitfulness, and corruption of his own heart, will be rather inclined to suspect himself, than strive to pacify his conscience by laying the guilt upon Satan, or any other. But you will perhaps say, "How shall I know when to charge any thing upon myself, and how far am I personally guilty of what I find working in me, or injected into my mind?" I answer, You need not be much at a loss upon this head; for I must tell you in real faithfulness, that you are to charge every suggestion upon yourselves, as your own fault, so far as you yourselves are either active in them,

consent to them, or feel any pleasure in the reception of them; yea, so far as you do not seriously and heartily oppose them, so far you bring blame and guilt upon yourselves. But yet,

2. *Do not charge all upon yourselves.* This advice I have to recommend unto all those that are perpetually troubled with, and perplexed by, those workings in their minds, which are exceeding grievous and offensive to them. Art thou, O poor soul, troubled with blasphemous thoughts, or dost thou find thyself hurried on into that which is contrary to the frame of thy mind, and the temper of thy heart? Remember for thy comfort that these things are only to be viewed as *afflictions*, and that they will not be imputed to thee as *sins*. Thou art ready to say indeed, "Oh! I am filled with so many evil thoughts, with so many blasphemies against God, with so much questioning about the truth, that surely my heart must be very bad, and my case very desperate; surely never a poor sinner was ever so vile as I am!" And is this the language of thy soul? Remember, this very complaint is a happy token that these things are not to be laid to thy charge; neither will they be imputed to thee by him who knows the secrets of all hearts. The great and gracious God, that sees all the ways and workings of the wicked one, and knows the workings and strugglings of thy heart against his violent and abominable suggestions, will have compassion upon thee; will consider thy frame, and resent the indignities that are offered to thee by Satan, as if done to himself. And thou hast great reason to bless God under all this spiritual affliction, if thou art enabled still to withhold the consent of thy will, and still to abhor and detest those suggestions from thy very heart. Let these thoughts encourage and excite thee to go on resisting the devil, being confident in the faith, and he will flee from thee.

3. When you find, upon examination, that it is difficult or impossible to decide from whence the temptation comes, *it is the best way to take the fault of it upon yourselves.* Sometimes experiences of this kind are so intricate, that we cannot come to any certainty whether Satan or our own hearts have the chief hand in the present evil. Now I apprehend that in such cases we need not be too curious to know whether Satan began first, or our own hearts; for whatsoever it be, or from whencesoever it may first come, yet it is our own in the event, if it suits our natural inclination, if it falls in with the temper of our own minds, and is received with any delight in our souls. Besides, it is a general rule, which we may always take; namely, That whatsoever is difficult to be known, it is of very

little importance to decide it. And we may be very sure it is so in the present case, because that which renders it difficult to make the distinction is, the coincidence of our own hearts with the temptation. Perhaps some persons may be for indulging a curiosity of mind in solving of this question, and so may spend their time and thoughts in inquiring which is most guilty, Satan or themselves; whereas their thoughts and time would be better employed in humbling themselves for the share their own hearts have in the iniquity, and in setting about to resist the temptation.

4thly and lastly, Remember, *That neither temptation nor corruption can bar up the door of hope*, or be a sufficient reason for any soul to sink into desperation. This I speak for the encouragement and direction of those who are perpetually entertaining gloomy thoughts concerning themselves, because they feel so much corruption working, or find themselves so much under the power of temptation. Many serious persons are continually poring upon themselves, and complaining under their burdens to such a degree, as to prevent them from taking the comfort, and embracing the hope, which the gospel holds forth. Let this therefore be a general rule with you, *That whatsoever corruptions are seen and lamented, and whatsoever temptations are felt as a burden, be they ever so bad, they can be no reason for discouragement.* Though you may be continually buffeted by Satan's temptations, or continually distressed by the rising of your own corruptions; yet still remember the hope of the gospel is gloriously full, and completely free; so free, that the corruptions of your hearts cannot destroy it, nor the temptations of Satan deprive you of a right to lay hold of it. Nay, the more violently thou art tempted, and the more thou seest thyself corrupted, the stronger is the call upon thee to fly to the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, both against sin and Satan; for the Lord Jesus Christ is a ready succour to all such as are hurried and perplexed either by their internal or external enemies. Such as these are the very persons that Christ has promised to save: for it is said, Ps. lxxii. 13, 14. *He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight.* Believe therefore this gracious promise, and lay hold of it for thyself; and thou mayest then be sure of this, that the *God of peace will bruise Satan under thy feet shortly*, Rom. xvi. 20.

CASE XIV.

How may a person know when he has the assistance of the Spirit of God in prayer?

IT is not one of the least of our privileges to have the Spirit promised, as a *Spirit of grace and supplication*, Zech. xii. 10. and to have encouragement to expect his assistance in our approaches to the throne of grace. And it is of great importance for the Christian to know that he has the Spirit with him in prayer; as it has a peculiar tendency to satisfy him that he is a child of God, gives him hopes of acceptance, and is a means of promoting a steady dependance upon him, and encouraging his expectations of all suitable supplies from him.

Now the Spirit is not always equally present with us in the duty of prayer. We often provoke him to leave us in some measure, that he may try and humble us: and then, How heavily do we go on! We perform the outside of the duty, but we are strangers too much to the Spirit and life of it. The Spirit indeed is often present with the Christian, and he perceives it not. That we may therefore be able to distinguish aright here, is our present inquiry.

Here I shall only mention three things, from which I apprehend we may conclude whether we have the Spirit or not in prayer, viz. We may know it from the spiritual light and discerning he gives us of spiritual things—From the manner and frame, in which he enables us to pray—And from the ends we have in view in the duty.

I. *The Spirit as a Spirit of prayer, opens to us a view of those great and important things, which it is necessary we should know, that we may pray aright.* This appears in two things: in opening our eyes, and giving us a sight of our various wants; and in setting before us the nature, variety, and excellency of those blessings that are suited to our circumstances.

1. *The Spirit opens our eyes, and gives us a sight and sense of our various wants.*—The Spirit in prayer acts as a *Spirit of illumination*. He first gives us a view of our state, and then affects our minds with it. He opens to us our *hearts*, and discovers those things, that would otherwise have lain concealed. He impresses upon us a sense, and gives us a view of

our *guilt*, shows us the awful demerit of sin, and the numberless instances in which we have been chargeable with it: so that, to use the Apostle's language, *sin revives, and we die*; Rom. vii. 9. We see ourselves lost and undone, without an interest in pardoning mercy. The Spirit brings to our view those secret evils of *pride, lust, vain thoughts, wanderings in duty*, and other heart-sins, which escape the notice of the unrenewed sinner. He shows us how *filthy* our natures are, and what need we stand in of sanctifying grace. He lets us see the *imperfections* of our *best* duties, and therefore how insufficient to justify us before God. He discovers to us the *power* sin has within us, and our weakness and inability to withstand its opposition, and keep on in our christian course. He shows us our *nakedness* and poverty, our *weakness* and folly, our *blindness* and stupidity; and all to sink us in our *own* esteem, and to stir us up to seek to him in whom *all* our help is found. This therefore is a *necessary* part of the Spirit's work. But,

2. *The Spirit sets before us the nature, variety, and excellency of those blessings which are represented in the gospel.* Does he show us our guilt? He shows us *pardon* too; by whom it is purchased; and how it is to be had, viz. in an application by faith to Jesus Christ. Does he set before us the sins of our services, the depravity of our natures, our weakness, folly, and emptiness? He at the same time directs us to an infinitely pure and everlasting righteousness to justify us, grace purchased and prepared to sanctify us, strength to preserve us, treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and an inexhaustible fulness in our exalted Redeemer to supply every want. He opens to us the promises of the gospel, and shows us their fulness and glory. And finally, he gives us a view of that great salvation exhibited in the gospel, the blessings of which it consists, their riches, suitableness, and excellency; and all to direct our petitions, and add fervency to our desires. Through ignorance, we are often ready to ask amiss; to be importunate for a temporal blessing, when we should rather have had our eyes fixed upon those of a spiritual nature. It was ignorance that made the mother of Zebedee's children ask, *that her sons might sit, the one on the right-hand, and the other on the left-hand of Christ in his kingdom*, Matt. xx. 21. This part of the Spirit's work therefore is of great importance; and if, when drawing near to God, we have had a view of our guilt, vileness, weakness, &c. and of the glories of the gospel, the blessings of the everlasting covenant, and the fulness that

is in Christ, we have reason to conclude *that the Spirit was with us.*

II. We may know in some measure whether we have the assistance of the Spirit or not, *from the frame of soul in which we pray.*—As,

1. If we have the Spirit with us, we are in the most humble frame. Thus, when Abraham was pleading for Sodom, Gen. xviii. 23—32. with what humility did he do it; what awe and reverence filled his soul at a view of the infinite majesty of that God he was speaking to; and how did he admire his amazing condescension in admitting such a weak imperfect creature to stand before him! *A proud spirit is an abomination to the Lord,* and contrary to the spirit of the gospel. When a Christian comes under the influences of the Spirit to the throne of grace, what a sense has he of his vileness, his ingratitude, his unworthiness of every mercy! How ready to renounce all his own righteousnesses, and reckon them but as *filthy rags!* How willing to receive salvation as a free gift, and to admire infinite rich grace in the bestowment of it! *This, this,* is the frame that shows the Christian, and runs through all his duties, when the Spirit is with him—See him: there he is, falling down before God. View his humble posture, an emblem of the deeper humility of his soul. Hear his confessions, how he laments his numerous backslidings, chides his slothful soul, and dares not even lift up his eyes to heaven: but when he does, how sweetly does he admire divine grace to such a wretch! Oh, he sinks into nothing!—What is his errand? See, how humbly he delivers it! He dare not dictate to God. Has he an affliction in prospect, or is he actually under the exercise of one? Though he would rejoice to have the one averted, and the other removed, yet he desires to be all submission; and therefore you hear him saying, “Father, if it may be for thy glory, let not such an affliction come upon me, or take away this thorn in the flesh; yet shall I presume to direct thee? No, like my dearest Lord, I would say, *Not my will, but thine be done,*” Matt. xxvi. 39. Thus Eli received the news from Samuel concerning his children, 1 Sam. iii. 18. And thus David committed himself and his affairs into the hands of God, when Absalom in a most unnatural manner rose up against him, and obliged him to go out of Jerusalem, 2 Sam. xv. 25.—When a Son comes in this humble frame to the throne of grace, it is a sign that he has the Spirit of God with him.

2. We may conclude that the Spirit of God is with us, when

we are enabled to pray with *continued earnestness* and *importunity*.—The Spirit is said to *make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*, Rom. viii. 26. intimating, that our desires are sometimes so strong, that we cannot find suitable words to express them by, and therefore utter them by groanings and broken sighs. Have you not found such seasons, when your souls were filled with such breathings after God, that you could not express them? This seemed to be the Publican's case. He had such a sense of his filthy, miserable condition, and such desires after salvation, that he could not properly utter them. He opens his heart first by outward signs, and then in those short but comprehensive words, *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner*, Luke xviii. 13. The Christian oftentimes, under temporal or spiritual difficulties, comes and pours out his heart with a peculiar degree of earnestness, as the disciples did when they came and awoke their Master, saying, *Lord, save us; we perish*, Matt. viii. 25. The words point out a peculiar *eagerness* and *vehemency*, a mind in distress, having more than the tongue can well utter.—When we are slothful and formal in this duty of prayer; when we are, as it were, unconcerned about what frame we are in, or what we pray for; when we come only out of custom, and half asleep present ourselves before God, and our words die upon our lips, it is a sign that we know nothing of the Spirit's assistance in that duty; Saul did not pray thus, when he was converted. He might indeed, whilst he was a Pharisee: but had you seen him upon his knees, *after* Christ called to him from heaven, you would have heard him wrestling with holy importunity, under a deep sense of his numerous sins, and of the importance of spiritual blessings. The Spirit sweetly filled his mouth with arguments, and helped him to expostulate with God. Thus Jacob wrestled with the Lord: *He would not let him go, unless he blessed him*, Gen. xxxii. 24—26. How happy when the Christian is enabled to do so too! This shows that he has the Spirit of God with him, opening his mouth, quickening his desires, melting his soul, enabling him even to turn *discouragements* into arguments, and to hold on pleading, as the *woman of Canaan* did. Who but the Spirit helps the Christian to take a *promise*, and come and plead it with God?—"Lord, here is thy word; the word by which thou hast caused me to hope. I would plead it with thee, Lord, is it not thine own promise, and wilt thou not fulfil it? Oh, permit me to expostulate with thee. I cannot be silent, but must speak. I am miserable, and shall be for ever, unless

thou wilt look upon me. Lord, stretch forth thine hand, and for thy great name's sake do thou pardon, sanctify, and save me." Such wrestlings show that we are in good earnest, and that we have the Spirit of God with us.

3. We have the Spirit with us, *when we are enabled to pray in the name of Christ*. Thus our Lord tells us, that there is no coming unto the Father, but in, and through him; and that whatsoever we shall ask in his name, that he will do, John xiv. 6. 13. It is not intimated by this, that it is enough to *mention* the name of Christ, but that in our addresses to God we *look to*, and *depend upon* Christ the Mediator for acceptance. That we come renouncing all merit of our own, taking the sacrifice of Jesus into the arms of our faith, presenting it before God as a *sufficient atonement* for our sins, and pleading its infinite merit for our pardon, and for the bestowment of every blessing we want. Hear the language of the soul, when drawing near to God, and see the ground of his dependance:—"Lord, I would venture near thy throne in the name of my Mediator. It is in *him alone* that it is become a throne of grace, and to *him* would I ascribe *all* the glory. Lord, Behold, see what he has done and suffered. View the sacrifice thou hast appointed, thou hast accepted, and receive a poor unworthy creature. I have nothing to recommend myself to thee, but, adored be thine infinite grace, my Redeemer has. On his mediation I would rest my soul, and come with boldness, and though guilty, expect pardon, and a whole salvation." To exercise this faith in Christ; to sink ourselves and our services, and exalt him, is more than a creature can do. Whenever therefore we are enabled to lie at the feet of Christ, and to come thus in his name, we have the Spirit of God with us, whose peculiar business it is to render the Mediator glorious in the eyes of a poor guilty creature.

4. We may conclude that the Spirit is with us, *when we find a sweet acquiescence in, and love to God in prayer*; when we are enabled to view the emptiness of all earthly enjoyments, and to rest in God as a sufficient portion; when we find an entire acquiescence in him, and are helped to draw near, crying, Abba, Father; when we come in a childlike frame, valuing the favour of our heavenly Father before all inferior things, finding a sweet subjection and obedience of soul, and are satisfied with that communion we have with him. For instance; that Christian has the presence of the Spirit, who is enabled to draw near to God in some such manner as this:—"Lord, whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is

none upon earth I desire besides thee. Say but to my soul that thou art my salvation, and *I shall rejoice more than if my corn, and wine, and oil increased.* I am satisfied, Lord, I am satisfied. It is enough that thou art mine. Thou art portion enough. Oh, the everlasting love of thee, O Father! What shall I not render to thee for thinking of a creature so unworthy? Oh thine infinite love, O mighty God, in coming to rescue me from darkness and ruin! How amiable is thy person, and how easy thy yoke! Oh, my soul would love thee, and serve thee with greater diligence and affection than I have hitherto done. I would esteem *thy love better than wine.* Oh, my Prophet, my Priest, my King, thou shalt be *all* to me, and I will give up *my all* to thee."—This shows that we have the assistance of the Spirit, else we could not so fully give up ourselves to God, and so sweetly acquiesce in him as our portion.

III. We may conclude that we have the Spirit assisting us in prayer, *from the ends we have in view.*—If we pray only to *satisfy* conscience, and lull that asleep; if to make atonement for some sins we have been guilty of; to establish a righteousness of our own to appear in before God; or, if we retire only to please those we stand related to, or to bring about some selfish ends, we may at once conclude, that we have not the Spirit with us. But if we come to the throne of grace with a view to the glory of God, and the everlasting advantage of ours, and of others souls; if this is our chief end, this the mark we aim at in prayer; if therefore our greatest concern is, that we may be delivered from the power of sin, that our corruptions may be subdued, our polluted natures sanctified, our tempers, thoughts, and affections, made more spiritual and holy, and our whole souls brought into a growing conformity to God; if we come for wisdom to guide and direct us, for strength to keep us in an hour of temptation, for righteousness to clothe us, and for greater measures of grace to enable us to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God; if, finally, they are spiritual blessings we have our eyes chiefly fixed upon, and these are the springs and motives from whence we consequently act, we may then comfortably conclude, that we have the Spirit of God with us in prayer.—Let us now bring the case more home to ourselves by a particular application. And,

1. *Let us all be concerned to examine ourselves as to this important matter.* Let me inquire, O my soul, how it is with me, when I come to God by prayer. Have I a sense of my

numerous wants? Do I see my nakedness and poverty? Do I appear vile in my own eyes? Am I enabled to mourn over sin, to humble myself before God, and admire the riches of his grace in taking notice of a creature so unworthy? Do I find a submission of soul to God in prayer, a willingness to be disposed of by him at his pleasure? Have I a sense of the excellency and importance of spiritual blessings, and am I enabled to plead with God for them, as a person in good earnest? Do I come in the name of Jesus, looking to him alone for acceptance, and building all my hopes of salvation upon him? Do I at any time find a sweet acquiescence in God, esteeming myself happy, if I have but any communion with him, and can but cry *Abba, Father*? yea, inconceivably more happy, than if I had all the world? Have I any reason to conclude, that I have his glory in view? Is my errand to the throne of grace to lament over my sins, to beg for renewing and sanctifying grace, that I may be more like God, and be prepared to honour him more in every circumstance in life? These are questions of great importance, and should be attended to by us all with the greatest faithfulness and impartiality.

2. *We may improve this subject by way of consolation.* If, upon examination you have reason to believe that you have found the Spirit with you, thus directing and assisting your petitions, you may from thence conclude, that you are the children of God. For the Spirit as a Spirit of prayer, is a special blessing of the new covenant, and is not given to those who are strangers to the divine life. You may farther conclude, that your prayers shall be answered in God's own time, and in his own way; and therefore be waiting with expectation of it, and that God will take you under his peculiar care, and fulfil all his promises in the bestowment of every needful blessing.—Hence conclude farther for your comfort, that if the Spirit is with you as a Spirit of prayer, he will be with you too as a Spirit of sanctification, as a Spirit of illumination to enlighten you more and more in the great mysteries of grace;—as a guide to direct your ways, till he brings you to his heavenly kingdom;—and, when he sees fit, as a Spirit of adoption, as the great comforter to support and cheer your souls under every difficulty.

3. Hence learn the difference between the intercession of Christ, and that of the Spirit. The one prays for us; the other prays in us, or helps us to pray. Christ pleads in heaven; the Spirit helps his people here on earth, opens their

eyes, warms their hearts, quickens their desires, and enables them to turn them into petitions. Christ's intercession and the Spirit's too are of great importance; and, blessed be God, his people enjoy them both. Whilst Christ is interceding for them above, the Spirit is helping them to plead with God for themselves here. Oh, glory be to God, who has made such provision for us, and given us such encouragement to pray and wait for his salvation!

4. Hence *we have reason to be humbled, that we have paid so little regard to the Spirit in prayer.* How many have been rather concerned to pray with fluency and elegance of expression, than to find the Spirit with them, kindling a fire of divine love in their souls, and enabling them to pour out their hearts before the Lord? Let us each be humbled that we have so much neglected the Spirit in this important character; take care that we grieve him not, and so provoke him to withdraw from us. And finally, May none of us dare to live without prayer, and yet always look upon those prayers as useless and unprofitable, which are only put up to satisfy conscience, or out of mere custom, and be concerned that we not only are favoured with the gift, but experience the grace and *Spirit of prayer.* To this may we all say, *Amen.*

CASE XV.

How may we keep from spiritual pride, after special enlargements in duty?

I AM directed to take this case under consideration, in consequence of the following short, but pithy and experimental epistle:

“ SIR,

“ I AM one who have professed to have received Christ Jesus the Lord: O that I could say, I walked answerable to so great and glorious a privilege! But, alas, I find a sad carnality and coldness in duty, and see that my very best performances are utterly insufficient to recommend me to a holy God; nay, that there is enough in each of them to merit everlasting

punishment. Yet, when I have some happy enlargement in duty, especially that of prayer, this corrupt heart of mine is ready to say, *Well done, this is something like praying; now God will hear my petitions, and accept my person.* Thus is my proud heart puffed up! This rust of pride soon eats out all the spirituality of my frame. I should be glad, Sir, to have the following query answered:—*How may a person keep from spiritual pride, after unusual enlargements in duty?*

METHINKS, upon laying this letter before you, I hear many of the hearts of God's dear children echoing to these complaints, and longing to have such an important query resolved. It is a common, but a very sad complaint of the believer, that he finds a great deal of coldness and indifferency in spiritual duties. He feels his soul cleaving to the dust, his affections stupefied, his heart hardened, his conscience benumbed, and all the powers of his soul sadly inactive; so that there seems to be no grace in exercise, and the duties performed appear to be no better than dead works. In the above epistle we find a very humble and suitable acknowledgment, that the best of our performances are utterly insufficient to recommend us to God, and that there is sin enough in them to deserve eternal punishment. And one would think, that a person who really sees and feels these things in himself, could not but be humbled before God at all times, and upon every occasion, being sensible of the imperfections of his best duties, and the sin that cleaves to them. For certainly there is much unbelief mixed with our faith, much diffidence with our hope, much coldness with our love, and much corruption with our desires. But yet we find in the above epistle, that all this acknowledgment, sense, and experience, will not root up, nor keep down this weed of pride in our hearts. It will and does remain and appear upon various occasions, and at no seasons more commonly than after spiritual enlargement in duty. The manner of its working is here set forth very exactly and feelingly; for, if God at any time gives us the tokens of his love, draws forth our desires in prayer, enables us to wrestle and plead with him, and to lay hold of his promises, we find that pride is such a weed that it will grow upon the very best of our duties, and the most comfortable of our enjoyments. Upon this the heart cries out, as Leah did, "*Surely my husband will love me because I am fruitful: I shall be amiable in the sight of my Lord, because of the excellency of these duties, and the spirituality of these my affections.*" And what follows upon

all this? Why the consequence is very sad and afflictive: these motions of pride spoil the duty, make it unacceptable and abominable to God, and prevent all the happy effects which we hoped would result from thence. For in this way we hug our comforts to death: pride, like a canker, preys upon the very vitals of the new creature, perverts the affections of the soul, and promotes a carnal security; and thus that which should have been for our welfare becomes a snare to our souls. And I will venture to affirm, that whosoever seriously attends to his own heart, will find much of this in him, which may well fill him with shame, and make him humble for the pride of his heart; knowing that thereby he has provoked God, and polluted his own soul. Upon this, comfort is withdrawn, God is displeased, he hides his face, and the believer is troubled. But after all the disadvantages we feel from the workings of spiritual pride, we find this cursed principle will rise and work. We know not how to root it out, or keep it under, and would be glad to know what methods to take, to be able to walk with true humility before God. I confess it is very difficult to give any effectual directions in such a case as this; because pride is so interwoven in our very natures, and works in such a secret and undermining way. However, I would mention a few particulars, which, by the blessing of God, may be happily successful for the removing this grievous complaint.

1. Endeavour to detect and pursue the workings of pride in its various appearances. Pride in the believer's heart is like a midnight thief, which cares not to be seen and observed; and nothing tends more to suppress it, than to be looking upon it; for immediately upon its being discerned, it does, as it were, hide its head for shame. This rule our friend in his letter seems to have been enabled, in some measure, to follow: otherwise he could never have drawn out this complaint from his own experience so feelingly and exactly. But it is not sufficient merely to observe it in this particular appearance of it; we ought to pursue it in its other forms: for it is very likely, that the reason why this cursed principle rises and prevails at present, is, because it has got some strength in other respects, which perhaps has not as yet been discovered. Let me therefore ask you, my dear friend, whether you, who are so much puffed up upon spiritual enlargements, do not feel yourself as much discouraged and disheartened under spiritual contractions? Perhaps you have been used to think, that these discouragements have been the effect of true conviction and humiliation; you think that, when you have not much enlarge-

ment in duty, you have reason to be discouraged, and to be afraid of embracing the free hope of the gospel. Let me therefore entreat you to look a little closer into this matter: for I am very suspicious that pride gains and maintains its power in this way; because it is in these circumstances more insensible and undiscerned. You think it reasonable to be sunk in yourself; and imagine that you must not dare to lay hold of free grace, while under spiritual complaints. Now what is this, but a certain kind of secret pride? It is a saying in your heart, that if you had more holiness, and less sin, then you could be more encouraged; which is as much as to say, that our encouragement to hope before God is grounded upon the smallness of our sins, or the purity of our hearts; as if the greatness of our sins and corruptions took away our right to the free promise of the gospel. Now such a frame of mind as this, if rightly explained, will be found to be nothing less than the forcing a condition upon a *free* promise. You ought indeed to be humbled and ashamed under corrupt and unbelieving experiences; but if hereby your heart is deterred from laying hold of the free promise, you may take it for granted, that here is pride at the bottom. Perhaps it is in this unsuspected way, the accursed principle maintains its strength in your soul. For it is no wonder, if the same principle, which makes you discouraged, because of your sins and corruptions, should fill you with high thoughts of yourself, when you find any special enlargement. And as we should endeavour thus to *detect*, so we should likewise attempt to *pursue* it in its workings. Are we at first discouraged, as if grace was not entirely free; and do we then begin to see the evil of this unbelieving frame, and to fly absolutely to Christ? We should, in the next place, see whether this same principle does not make us proud of our very faith and humility. When, by the exercise of faith, we have received fresh grace and comfort, now let us see farther, whether the same principle does not make us proud of the grace received. Yea farther, if we set about to humble ourselves for the pride of our hearts, let us watch ourselves narrowly, lest we be made proud of our very humility. Upon the whole, we should thus pursue it from step to step, as it rises; and this, by a divine blessing, will have an admirable tendency to subdue its power, and supplant its workings.

2. *Observe how irrational, abominable, and detrimental, spiritual pride is.* You know that, in temporal cases, it is not enough to see an enemy; but to see and know him as such, in order to

be the more watchful against him, and the more steady in opposing of him. Thus with regard to this dangerous foe; though it be so suited to our natures, that we are ready sometimes to take it for a friend, yet it will be found, upon a close examination, to be the most detestable and destructive enemy. For, what can be more irrational, than for a poor, necessitous, filthy, guilty creature to be elated in the presence of a holy and just God? What can be more provoking to God, than for our hearts to take the crown from his head, and put it upon our own? And what can be more detrimental to the life of religion in our souls, than self-sufficiency? Pride strikes at the very root of all our comforts and graces, and humility is a necessary ingredient in all spiritual experience. For if our faith be true, it is an humble faith; if our hope be genuine, it is an humble hope; if our love be sincere, it is an humble love. The same must be said concerning all the other graces of the new creature. Pride contradicts the first principles of the oracles of God; for, when our minds suggest that God will accept our persons, and receive us into favour, because of our enlargement in duty, our hearts then speak directly contrary to the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. And still, to set forth more of the exceeding sinfulness of this sin, let us consider how peculiarly ungrateful it must be for us to dishonour God by those very favours and comforts which he freely indulges us with. Let such thoughts as these frequently recur to our minds, that we may maintain a perpetual hatred of this abomination; and this may be a happy means of weakening its influence in us.

3. *Fight against* it by the word of God and prayer. You know, in temporal cases, it is not enough to see and hate an enemy; but we are likewise to oppose him, and militate against him. If therefore you would know how to fight against this spiritual adversary, I would direct you to take the sword of the Spirit into your hands, and with it strike at this sin. In order to familiarize the manner in which you are to do this, let me put it in the following light: does thy heart say, "O this is something like praying?" Then produce some such word as that in answer to the suggestion, that *We know not what to pray for as we ought*. Does thy mind say, "Surely God will accept my person, because of my good deeds?" Reply to this suggestion in the language of scripture, *Not by works, lest any man should boast*. Does the pride of thy heart say, "Surely I am amiable in God's sight, because of what I am, and have done? Give an answer in some such words as these: *What*

hast thou which thou hast not received, &c. This is the way to play the artillery of revelation against the workings of corruption. And while you are attempting thus to resist the devil and your own corruptions, look up to God by prayer; imploring that he would recollect to your mind by his Spirit such portions of his word, as may be a full answer to the language of your pride; and that he would likewise impress those sentiments upon your minds and hearts, and give them such a force and energy, as will effectually humble your souls, and shame your pride.

4. *Endeavour to turn this experience in another channel.* You know, that when a river swells, and begins to overflow its banks, the way to prevent it, is to open the sluices, and let the water run out; whereby it is kept from running over those places, where it would be detrimental rather than serviceable. Men have this wisdom in natural things; and oh, that Christians had but such skill in spiritual things! but you will perhaps say, How shall I turn this sad experience into another channel? I answer, art thou enlarged in thy soul, comfortable in thy frame, lively and spiritual in thy duties? Instead of taking occasion from hence to be lifted up, rather make it an occasion of thankfulness and encouragement. Endeavour therefore to reason after this manner: "Am I thus favoured with special and delightful experiences? O let me remember, this is not of my own production; and what a call is this upon me to be thankful to God for his, interposing grace!" This surely will be found a proper method to remove the present complaint; because true thankfulness and spiritual pride are direct opposites to each other. For the more thankful we can be to God for what he works in us, and bestows upon us, the less we shall be subject to spiritual pride. Again, let these experiences be improved for farther encouragement. For, if pride takes advantage from a spiritual frame to puff us up, it will certainly sink and discourage our hearts, when that happy frame is withdrawn. But if we are enabled to take encouragement from the comforts and quickenings we feel, to hope that the same free grace and almighty power will appear in our favour in future times; this will be making the present experience preparatory for that season, when we may be called upon to live by faith, without sight or sense. Let us say in our souls, "If the Lord thus comforts and enlarges me by his free and powerful grace at present, then what reason have I to hope, if ever I fall into spiritual distress or into a carnal frame again, that the Lord will appear and work deliverance for me in the

same free, gracious, and powerful manner, that he has now done?" By this means, those spiritual frames, which have been the food of our pride, will become the food of our faith and love.

Lastly, *Take advantage*, from the workings of pride, *to excite and stir up spiritual graces*. As, by the complaints of the letter, we see that corrupt nature knows how to bring evil out of good; so we may be sure that the work of grace can bring great good out of this melancholy evil. For as there is nothing too good in this life to be misimproved by pride and self; so there is nothing too bad in Christian experience to be improved for spiritual advantage. There is such a thing as improving upon a barren ordinance, and upon a carnal, proud, and unbelieving frame. The proper way of doing this is as follows: Dost thou find thyself swelled and elated with pride? Take occasion from hence to know more of the corruptions of thine own heart, to see more of the sinfulness of sin, and to be more apprized of thine own insufficiency for every thing that is spiritually good. This sad experience is certainly a fresh evidence and proof of these soul-humbling truths: and if hereby thou art more feelingly convinced that without Christ thou canst do nothing; if thou art hereby more fully apprized of the deceitfulness and baseness of thine own heart; if thou art hereby made more clearly to see thine own impurity; these sights and convictions may be improved as a happy means of humbling and quickening thy soul, to lay thee low at the footstool of free grace, and to cast thyself upon the mercy of God in Christ. To do thus, is to fight Satan with his own weapons; to overcome corruption by its own appearances; and at once to defeat all the ends of the devil and corruption in the affair. It is very plain, that the design of Satan, and the tendency of these corruptions, are to eat out the life and power of godliness; whereas, if by these means thou learnest more of thyself, and seest more need of quickening, strengthening, and purifying grace; then these complaints will be so far from eating out the vitals of religion, that they will be a blessed means, in the hands of the Spirit, of promoting true humility and purity of heart. And what though thou shouldst be incapable, after all, to keep pride from working? yet in this way thou wilt find no real detriment arising from it, but rather the work of humiliation will be promoted and confirmed, by the very sight and sense thou hast of the corrupt motions of self and pride.

Let me conclude the whole with two or three brief reflections.

1. *How imperfect are the graces and experience of the children of God in the present state!* As a believer, in his worst condition, is very uncomfortable and distressed, or very carnal and worldly; so, in his best estate here, he is in great danger of being lifted up with pride and self-conceit. The greatest enjoyments and the highest attainments cannot secure him from falling by it. So that the strongest as well as the weakest believer has need to *watch and pray*, lest he enter into temptation.

2. *How desirable must heaven be!* Since there we shall be filled with joy unspeakable, and be possessed of perfect holiness; without the least hazard of losing our purity or delight. There will be the highest enjoyment, joined with the deepest humility; and the most perfect holiness, without the least tincture of pride. The perpetual enjoyment of God's love will make us completely happy; and the constant sight of God's glory will keep us entirely humble. Blessed state indeed!

3. *How blind are sinners with respect to their own hearts!* We very seldom hear them complaining of pride, when indeed they are full of it. They have frequently a high opinion of their own virtues, worth, and excellency, and think themselves justified herein; whereas, if they did but see themselves in the glass of the law, and would compare themselves with the unspotted purity of God, they would blush, and be confounded, and abhor themselves as unspeakably vile and abominable. We may take it for granted, that all those who have not seen and lamented their own pride, are as yet strangers, both to God and themselves, both to the law and the gospel; and if ever they are brought to Christ, they will be made to see and be humbled for the pride and stoutness of their own hearts.

CASE XVI.

Whether it is necessary to evidence a person's conversion, that he see and acknowledge himself the chief of sinners, though he has not been guilty of outward abominations? Or, what that sense of sin is, which is an evidence of conversion, and is therefore accompanied with salvation?

[The following epistle shows the propriety of the questions:]

“HAVING had the happiness of a religious education, and the privilege of sitting under the sound of the gospel, I trust I have, by the restraining grace of God, been kept from many external vices which youth too often run into. I have, by attending on the means of grace, been led to see myself a sinner, and in some degree to feel myself one: for I have daily cause to lament a hard heart, and a corrupt nature; and my daily prayer to God is, that he would search me, and show me the evil of my heart, and lead me in the way everlasting, and not suffer me to rest short of an interest in Christ. Now, as I have not been guilty of outward abominations, I cannot say with the Apostle Paul, that *I am the chief of sinners*, and so am afraid that I know *nothing* of renewing grace, and therefore should be glad that you would take into consideration the above questions.”

THIS case seems to be founded upon what the Apostle Paul says, 1 Tim. i. 15. who, after he had taken a view of the blasphemies he had been guilty of, and the injury he had done to the cause and followers of Christ, stiled himself the *chief of sinners*. But he did not intimate by this, that *all* who should for the future be saved should be persons of *his* character. No, he mentioned his being a *blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious*, that he might set forth the riches of divine grace in the salvation of a person so unworthy, and that it might be an *encouragement* to those, who in future ages should be distressed on account of the greatness of their sins, when they see, that the chief of sinners has been already pardoned and saved. The person who wrote this epistle has not been guilty of any notorious sins, and is therefore afraid he does not see enough

of sin; that he has not such a sense of his own vileness, as he ought to have; that his impressions are not *deep enough*; that he must have *such a view* of the wickedness of his heart, as readily to *rank himself* amongst the *chief of sinners*, though his conversation and behaviour have been regular and sober, else he can give no *true evidence* of his conversion.

In answering this case, I would throw my thoughts into the following method; and may God make what may be said, effectual both for conviction and establishment!

I. *There is a great difference in sins, as to their heinousness.* Every sin has an infinite evil in it, as being the violation of the law of an infinite Being. *The wages of all sin therefore is death.* Yet there are many circumstances that render some sins *more heinous* than others. We read of *scarlet sins*, and those that have *crimson stains* in them, Is. i. 18. Sins against light and knowledge, under strong convictions and great advantages, are attended with *peculiar aggravations*. The sins which Paul mentions were great sins, viz. blasphemy, persecution, &c. because he had the Old Testament to converse with, and had many opportunities of examining it whether Jesus was the Christ or not; but he was obstinately fixed against the cause of the Redeemer, and took no methods to soften his prejudices, but rather to increase them. Sins committed by the *same person* may be more or less heinous, according to the *particular circumstances* attending them. But,

II. *God pardons and saves all sorts of sinners.* Among the redeemed of the Lord are all ranks and degrees of sinners. Many who have had the privilege of a religious education, as this young person, are *singing the song of Moses and the Lamb*. There are some who were called in their early days, and others, who were not brought in till old age had enfeebled their natural frame. There are those who were sinners of the *first rank*, now triumphing in the mansions above, and arrayed with all the garments of salvation. There were all sorts among the Corinthian converts, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. God does not confine salvation to a *particular sort*. He saves sinners to magnify his *free, rich, and sovereign grace*; and therefore the heinousness of our sins is no objection.

III. *All that are saved have not the same deep sense of sin.* Some see the *exceeding sinfulness of sin*, feel the greatest legal terrors, and smite upon their breasts with the *utmost self-abbhorrence*, crying, *Lord, be merciful to us sinners*. When Saul's eyes were open, and *sin revived*; when he came to take a view of his blasphemies, his persecutions, &c. he was

amazed. When he came to look *within*, and to see such a sink of sin, how he mourned, loathed himself, and esteemed himself the *chief of sinners*, notwithstanding all the righteousness he boasted in before ! This sense of sin seemed necessary in him, to keep him humble, to fill him with admiration of the grace of God in putting him into the ministry, and so to be a constant spur to all diligence in the service of *that Jesus*, who had laid him under such peculiar obligations. But *all* have not this sense of sin, neither are brought the *same way* to Christ. Some are brought gently, without any legal terrors. They are drawn with the *cords of love*. Their hard hearts are melted down with a view of the riches of divine grace ; and the Spirit does not make such a discovery to them of sin all at once : it is rather a gradual work, and therefore a work of time. They have no outward abominations, as Saul had to loathe himself for, and have not the same deep sense of sin. God acts herein, so as is most for his own glory, or according to the different tempers of his people ; and therefore he takes various methods both to bring them first in, and to train them up for heaven.

IV. *We must not judge of a true, saving sense of sin from the measures or degrees of it, but from the manner of its operation, and its fruits and effects.* I would instance in a few particulars.

1. We may be said to have that sense of sin that is accompanied with salvation, when we are brought to a sight of our guilty, naked, helpless, and wretched state and condition. Do you see yourselves transgressors of the law, and therefore obnoxious to its curse ? Do you find you are naked, that you have no righteousness to justify you before God, all your services being filthy and polluted ? Do you see yourselves depraved in all the faculties of your souls ? Are you sensible of your weakness and incapacity, either to make atonement for sin, or subdue its power and dominion ? Upon the whole, do you see yourselves lost and miserable, blind and wretched, and the need you stand in of a Mediator to bring you into the divine favour, and to do all for you, and in you ? These heads of inquiry will discover whether you have a right sense of sin or not. These things must be felt and experienced, else all our confessions and acknowledgments of them will be mere words of course, and not the genuine workings of a principle of grace within us. But however a person may be afraid that he sees not himself vile enough ; if he has been led to discern his real state by nature, and is made sensible of his

spiritual wants, it is a comfortable sign that he has a suitable sense of sin.

2. Where there is a true sense of sin, there is a hatred of it, and a self-abhorrence for it. There may be an awful fear of hell, but no alteration in a person's disposition and affections. The sinner still loves sin, and would be glad to keep his sensual enjoyments, could he but escape everlasting burnings. On the other hand, the Christian loathes sin, and appears vile in his own eyes, because so much sin cleaves to his nature. He sees it as opposite to the holy law, and to the infinitely spotless nature of God, as having defaced the divine image in his soul, as carrying in it the greatest ingratitude, as doing the greatest injury, unfitting us for communion with God, interrupting us in duty, and robbing us of all our peace and comfort: finally, he sees its obliquity and deformity, and cannot therefore but hate it, and abhor himself on the account of it. He cannot talk of the goodness of his heart, as some vainly do, but appears vile and contemptible in his own eyes. He sees *nothing* in himself to lay a foundation for boasting, so long as sin remains in every faculty, and cleaves to every duty. It takes down his spiritual pride, and fills him with humility, and makes him mourn before the Lord. He sinks into nothing, when he considers the odiousness of sin, and wonders at divine grace in taking notice of a wretch so polluted. This hatred of sin and self-abhorrence is found in every renewed soul, even though he has not been guilty of any outward immorality, and is a clear evidence of our having a saving sense of sin.

3. *When we desire and are earnest to be delivered from it, we may conclude that we have a true sense of sin.* You may not see so much of the sinfulness of sin as some do, but it may be notwithstanding burdensome to you. You may be weary of such a companion, and cannot but desire a freedom from it. You reckon yourself a captive, a slave, and it is your great concern, in looking up to God, to have deliverance proclaimed. This shows that you have experienced the special quickening influences of the Spirit of God. This was one of the distinguishing parts of Paul's experience, Rom. vii. 24. *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord.* All who can adopt this language, who are longing to be thoroughly purged and cleansed from sin, and are thankful for any hopes of deliverance through the great Mediator, make it appear that sin is their real burden, and that they have such a sense of sin, as is an evidence of true conversion.

4. This appears, *when we are made willing to look to, and to rest upon Christ for all righteousness and salvation.* Those who have no true sense of sin will never make an application to Christ for salvation. Whilst Saul, the Pharisee, thought himself righteous, he was an enemy to Jesus Christ; but when sin revived, he despaired and died; saw Jesus as his only refuge, and was made willing to go to, and to rest upon him for salvation. His language is now, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—desiring to be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,* Rom. iii. 7, 8, 9. Wherever there is a right sense of sin, the soul will be willing to receive Christ; Christ in every character, as the Gospel represents him. “*Lord, says he, whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth I desire besides thee. I would give up my all to thee: I would cheerfully part with my own righteousness, leave my darling lusts, and give up my dearest Delilahs, and come to thee, naked and guilty, weak, helpless, and polluted, that I may be justified, sanctified, and saved by thee.*”—Wherever a sense of sin is attended with these happy effects, we may conclude that it was given us by the Spirit of God, and is an evidence of a saving change. There is one observation more which I would mention.

V. *The more we grow in grace, the more we shall see of the sinfulness and detestableness of sin.* Our knowledge is like the morning light, which shineth more and more, till it comes to perfect day. You may not see so much of sin and of yourself, as you will when God comes to lead you into an acquaintance with your own heart. You may not have been chargeable with any outward immoralities; but, as you grow in grace, you will see more of your own vileness, and see reason enough to stifle yourself the unworthiest of creatures. When you consider your nature, how depraved, that if God had left you to yourself, you would have run into the same excesses as others have done: when you view the sins you have been guilty of as a Christian, the convictions you have stifled, your murmurings and ingratitude, the rebellion of your heart, your numberless vain thoughts, your coldness and formality, your spiritual pride and ostentation, your carnality, your omissions of duty, your careless performance of duty, and your unmortified affections; as you consider these, you will be convinced more and more of your own vileness, and, when before God, be ready to stifle

yourself *the chief of sinners*, because your obligations, your engagements, your mercies have been so great and numerous. The more we are like God, the more humbling views we have of ourselves. Sin and holiness are two opposites. As sin increases, our aversion to holiness increases. So, on the other hand, as holiness increases, we see more of the malignity of sin, and appear more and more odious in our own eyes, even so as to think ourselves more vile than others, though we have not been guilty of any gross abominations.—Let us now apply what has been said to *ourselves*; and that we may come to some conclusion concerning our own state.

1. Let us carefully examine into our sense of sin.—You may not have so deep a sense of sin, as some around you have. You may be afraid that you see not enough of its odiousness, and of your own wretchedness.—Are you convinced that you are guilty, helpless, miserable, blind, and naked in yourselves? Do you hate and abhor yourselves *on the account of sin*? Do you desire to be delivered from it? Do you mourn over it before the Lord? Cannot you depend upon your services for justification, they appearing all polluted, and therefore as an unfit garment to cover you? Are you made sensible of your need of Christ, and willing to receive him in *all* his characters? Have you, under a sense of sin, been made thankful for a Saviour, been weaned from all self-dependence, and made to fly to him for all salvation? You have reason then to hope, that God has brought you out of darkness into his marvellous light, though your sense of sin may not be so deep and impressing, as it appears in some others.

Hence we see the weakness of Christians in general, in making that discouraging which ought to be encouraging. You are afraid that you see not enough of your own hearts; you are daily praying therefore, that God would let you see more of the plague that is in them. When he answers your prayers, you are immediately discouraged at the view, and are crying, Will God ever look upon such wretches as we are? Can all this be consistent with grace?—You should rather be thankful for a deeper sense and clearer views of what you are by nature. If indeed you grow more cold; if you omitted duties, &c. you might take the alarm; but if you find the same zeal for God, and a greater humility; if the sight you have of your hearts is improved by you, makes you appear more vile, and fills you with greater self-abhorrence, and thankfulness for a Saviour, rejoice, and look upon it as the work of the Spirit of God, and an evidence of your growth in grace.

3. *Let us look more into our own hearts, and be often considering the dreadful nature and demerit of sin.* When we see that we are the same by nature as the vilest; when we view the wickedness of our hearts, we may be stirred up to admire the grace of God in sending his Son into the world to save such; we may be quickened to adore him for making a difference between us and others, and for giving us any hopes of deliverance from sin. It would tend to keep us ever humble, to make us value the Redeemer more, and to rejoice in that fulness of merit and grace that is in him. And indeed we should never look upon sin, but upon Christ too, else we shall be ready to sink into discouragement. Whilst we view the one to humble us, let us view the other to encourage us; and then we shall say with the Apostle, Rom. vii. 25. *I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

4. *We may improve this subject by way of conviction.* You are all sinners by nature, lost sinners; even you, who may think you have a righteousness that is blameless. You who have not run into open, notorious sins, but have been sober and regular, you are *wretched and miserable, blind and naked.* Oh, that I could fasten the conviction upon you! But this is your unhappiness; you are miserable, and you see it not; you will not believe it. Let me tell you, and I tell you the truth, I lie not, that you must see yourselves in this wretched condition, or you will never apply aright to Christ for salvation. I must tell you, and I can say it is out of a real concern for your souls, that, notwithstanding all your duties, and all your good works, yet, if you have not a sense of your guilty, miserable condition; if you have not fled to Christ under that sense, as naked, perishing sinners, you are not fit for the kingdom of God. A hard saying it may appear, but nothing is a greater truth. You are some of those, concerning whom our Lord says, *that publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before them,* Matt. xxi. 31. You are such as are endeavouring to establish *a righteousness of your own, not submitting yourselves to the righteousness of God,* Rom. x. 3. The Lord open your eyes, and give you a sense of sin, that you may despair and die in yourselves, and, as helpless, miserable creatures, may look to him who alone can deliver you from the wrath to come. May we all say, Even so, Lord Jesus, let it be. *Amen.*

CASE XVII.

When a person has received a temporal mercy, which he prayed for, how shall he know whether it is granted in answer to prayer, and comes to him as a covenant blessing?

IT ought to be the concern of every person, that has any regard for his own soul, to see that his temporal mercies come to him with a divine blessing. Such a pious concern as this excited a friend to put this question to me; and, seeing the importance of it, I have therefore ventured to take it under consideration, and shall do these three things. 1. State the question itself. 2. Give a solution to it. 3. Make an improvement of it.

1. *As for the question itself*, I conceive it to stand in the following light. A person who hopes he has experienced the love of God in a covenant way, is earnestly desirous to receive every mercy, as coming from the hand of a covenant God, with love in his heart, with a smile in his countenance, and with the addition of his blessing. The gracious soul is supposed to have been in earnest with God, for a particular, important favour of divine providence; the consequence of which has been, that God has been pleased to grant him the mercy he requested. He is therefore ready to hope that it comes in answer to prayer, and desires that his heart may be affected with it, not only as a providential favour, but likewise as an instance and token of God's especial love. But he is desirous to know how he shall be assured that it comes as a token of the divine acceptance; and would be glad to be certified, whether he may venture to look upon the present providential favour in this encouraging light. He knows it is the very mercy he has prayed for; he knows likewise, it is such a favour as calls for special gratitude, and his conscience tells him that his soul was enlarged in prayer for it. These things then he is well assured of: but at the same time he sees he cannot from hence positively conclude, that the favour is sent in answer to prayer; and if it be, he cannot from hence be certain that it comes with a divine blessing. For he is ready to suspect, that he has been too eager in his supplications for a temporal blessing; that he has laid too great a stress upon it; and therefore fears, though it be granted, it may be

given to him not in love, but in anger. He is therefore very desirous to know in what manner, and upon what plan, he may judge in this affair; whether the favour comes in anger, or in love; and whether he may humbly depend upon a divine blessing, to make it turn out for his real and spiritual good. And doubtless nothing would be matter of greater joy and pleasure to a gracious soul, than to have reason to conclude, that a divine blessing will attend the providential mercy received; and, on the other hand, nothing can be a greater damp to a serious mind, than to have a prevailing suspicion, that what is granted will rather prove a snare and stumbling-block, than a covenant blessing. This is the question: but to amplify it a little, I would endeavour to make it familiar by an instance or two. You know that every Christian prays that God would give him day by day his necessary food. Now this temporal favour is what God gives unto those that do not pray for it, and have no sense of their dependence upon him for it: neither can we be sure that our daily provision is sanctified to us, merely because we pray for it, and God gives it. Again, perhaps in some special cases we pray for a deliverance out of some great trouble, as for the granting of some important favour in providence; and since it does not immediately follow, that these special mercies granted will be attended with a divine blessing, the question still remains, How shall we know whether they come in covenant love? I would therefore now proceed,

II. *To give a solution* to this serious and experimental question. And here let it be observed, that *three* or *four* things are previously necessary to assure us that what we receive comes to us in a covenant way.

1. *The person praying must be one in covenant with God.* One who is destitute of saving blessings may be so far led into the knowledge of divine providence, as to be stirred up to pray for a temporal mercy; yea, and to be thankful for it, when he has received it: and yet this cannot assure him that it will be really blessed to him. God may hear the cries, and answer the requests, of an unregenerate person; and yet, after all, there is still a curse upon *his basket and store*: for we know, that, as to unrenewed persons, their very prosperity is cursed. Thus God heard *Ahab*, when he humbled himself; and yet it does not appear that he was ever savingly renewed. Thus the mariners in *Jonah's* ship prayed every one to his god, and the Lord answered their request; but we have no reason to think that their deliverance came as a covenant blessing to

them. Let not any therefore presume to infer that they are interested in God's special love, merely because he answers their prayers with respect to temporal favours. But if thou art a person in covenant, and hast an interest in the blessings of grace, thou hast then the more reason to hope that what is granted comes with a blessing. *For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God*, Rom. viii. 28. No temporal mercy can come as a covenant blessing to a person who is destitute of saving grace, unless it be made a means of bringing him to Christ; but it may be granted as such to one who is already in Christ by vital union to him.

2. *The mercy prayed for must be such as is lawful for us to ask at the hands of God.* Sometimes the desires of the children of men, nay, and of the children of God too, are so wild and irregular, that they seek after what would rather be hurtful than helpful to them; and if we were allowed to choose for ourselves in all temporal cases, we should many a time make a wretched choice; yea, and if God was to answer such requests, he would do it, not in love, but in anger. Thus we find the Israelites asked flesh for their lusts, *and he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls*, Ps. cvi. 15.

3. *The views of the mind in asking the blessing must likewise be lawful.* Perhaps we may desire a particular favour in order to gratify our pride, to indulge our lusts, or to be at a greater liberty to enjoy ourselves, without bringing any glory to God. Now when a person prays for a temporal favour with such views, he has no reason to expect it will be granted him; or, if granted, that it will be a blessing to him. For it is a mocking of God to ask a temporal favour with such a view: and it would be rather a mercy than a judgment, for God to deny such a request, Jam. iv. 3. *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts.* We should therefore look well to our aims and ends in praying for a providential mercy, if we hope to have it granted in love.

4. *The methods taken to obtain the mercy sought should likewise be lawful.* For however valuable the favour may be in itself; yet, if it be obtained in an unlawful manner, we have no reason to expect the divine blessing upon it. It is true, God may, and sometimes does, bring good out of evil, as in the case of Jacob's obtaining his father's blessing by fraud. But this must be no pattern to us: nor can we expect that God should smile upon unlawful means; and though they should prove successful, it is a thousand to one but what

is obtained becomes *a snare, a trap, a stumblingblock, and a recompense to us*, Rom. xi. 9.

These four things, I say, must be previously supposed; otherwise we can have no reason to think that the mercy received will be a real blessing to us. And I farther apprehend, that supposing we are right in these four particulars, yet these of themselves are not sufficient to ascertain the present important point. For some other thoughts must be added, in order to give us ground to conclude that what we receive comes in a covenant way.

Are you then earnestly desirous to know whether a special temporal mercy comes with a divine smile and blessing? I must beg you to make the following inquiries.

1. Inquire whether you have prayed for it as a covenant blessing. If our hearts are right with God, and our minds in a proper frame, when engaged in the duty of prayer, we do not ask for any mercy whatsoever, but with a higher view than as a temporal favour. We seek such a mercy, that God may be glorified, that our souls may be endeared to him, that we may be rendered more capable to honour him by what he gives us. We desire to receive it from Christ, not only as King of providence, but likewise as King of grace. We are willing to forego the mercy, if God sees it will not be for his glory and our good to grant it; and we dread the thoughts of receiving any favour merely as a temporal one. It is in the nature of true prayer in such a case to look abundantly above and beyond the mercy sought, however desirable it may be to flesh and blood. *True prayer* teaches us to seek such a favour as a branch of the covenant; as a mercy that would subserve the glory of God's name and our spiritual good. We desire that the Father may be glorified in it, not only as a God of providence, but as a God of grace. We desire that the Son may be glorified by it, as a fruit of his redeeming love and grace. We desire that the Holy Spirit may be glorified in it, by making it effectual for quickening, humbling, and endearing purposes. Now, if these are our real views in seeking after a temporal mercy, we have the highest reason to think, that when it is granted, it comes from a covenant God, attended with the blessing of Christ, and the influences of his Spirit.

2. Inquire whether you received it as a covenant blessing. When it came into your hands, or when it was bestowed upon your persons or families, be solicitous to observe with what frame of spirit you received it. Was it merely as a temporal favour? Was it merely with thankfulness, because God had

been so good to you, as thereby to increase your substance, your family, or reputation? If this was all, you have reason to fear, that it has not come in a covenant channel. But if, on the contrary, you have been made to see something of the connexion between temporal mercies and spiritual blessings, and have received the present mercy as a token of God's love; and, if in its reception, it made such an impression upon your souls, as endeared your hearts to a God of grace, and stirred up your desires to spend and employ it for God in Christ; this is a happy token, that God has granted it as a real blessing.

3. Inquire whether you enjoy it as a covenant blessing. Now you have the mercy, doubtless you rejoice in it, and are thankful for it; but how do you enjoy it? Oh, there is a great deal of difference between the enjoyment that a believer has of a mercy when in a right frame, and that enjoyment of it which others have. Unrenewed persons can taste a natural sweetness in a temporal mercy, and can enjoy it with a natural pleasure; but the believer in a right frame can take a spiritual pleasure, and taste a spiritual sweetness in the enjoyment of it. It is the real desire of a true believer, in the want of all things to enjoy all in God, and in the fulness of all things to enjoy God in all.

4. Inquire whether you endeavour to improve the mercy as a covenant blessing. You have now got what you prayed for; and what do you desire now to do with it? Are you for making the best of it only in a natural way, and upon carnal principles? Or, are you for improving it in a way of gratitude to the God of grace, who has freely given you his Son, and has in him, and with him, freely given you this and every other mercy you are partakers of?

If you can conscientiously and seriously give an answer in the affirmative to the foregoing questions upon a close examination, you may then with the utmost certainty conclude, that what you have received comes to you in a covenant way, and will be blessed to you and yours to answer the most desirable and spiritual purposes.

III. I come now to the third general division; and that is, to make some improvement of the whole; which shall be done by the two following remarks:

1. *How unhappy are all unbelievers even in their best enjoyments!* They may indeed spend all their days in pleasure, honour, and wealth; they may have, as to this world, more than heart could wish: but it is their great misery, that in all

these things they know not God, and therefore can have no real enjoyment of him. Alas, what are all their pleasures worth, while they enjoy them with a curse? These temporal mercies, unless free grace prevent, will be only found to be a feeding them up unto the day of slaughter. There is such an awful curse upon all the possessions and enjoyments of the unbeliever, that *in the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of this mirth is heaviness.*

2. See hence, *what is the best method to attain the sweetest enjoyment of what we have.* O my brethren! if you desire to have a true relish of your mercies, esteem it a poor mean thing to have riches, honours, and pleasures, without God. Let it be your first concern to seek after an interest in the covenant of grace; and then see to it, that all you receive comes from the hands of God with a design for your spiritual and everlasting good. And if you can arrive to this happy frame of spirit, it will lighten every cross, and add a double sweetness to every enjoyment; for temporal mercies are upon this account abundantly sweeter to believers than to any others. The creature of itself is vain and insufficient. Its pleasures, however delicate, are either defective or cloying; the honours that the creature can bestow, however elevated, are empty and despicable; and the supplies which the creature can afford, however opulent, are uncertain and unsatisfying. Such they will be found to be by every one that observes his own experience, or has the least notion of what is truly good and great. To those who are destitute of the grace of God, they are perpetually ensnaring and polluting, and will prove rather a preparation for hell, than for heaven. But if a person be made a partaker of Christ, and is enabled to maintain communion with God, he will find the creature sanctified, blessed and sweetened to him; he will have such a relish of it, as will abundantly surpass all the pleasure that the carnal man can enjoy, or even conceive.

But I cannot represent this most spiritual and heavenly experience, better than by transcribing a letter to a friend, dictated by the eminently pious *Edward Polhill*, Esq. of the last age, after he had lost his sight; a letter, which shows a heart full of love to God, and lifted up above the creature in communion with him.

“ WORTHY SIR,

“ YOURS I received, and return many thanks to you for your kindness and prayers. I am blind, but, bless God, con-

tent. All that he doth is wise and just. All that comes in his will is welcome. His choice is better than mine. Eyes might have blinded, but blindness shall enlighten me. God hath not cast me off, but called me aside into the invisible world. There Jesus Christ is the only Sun. Mercy is as a sea of infinite sweetness for faith to bathe in. The promises are as green pastures of comfort. God himself is the dew, that makes a spring of graces in the heart. Heavenly truths are the firmament over our heads. The pure air is the Holy Spirit breathing in saints and ordinances. In this world the blind have a prospect, and may see the land afar off, which lieth beyond the line of time in another world. I may say it is good being here. I cannot see outward things; but the new creature in the heart is a better sight than all the world. I cannot read the letters in the Bible; but if I have the quickening Spirit, it is enough. The covenant may be felt in the heart. The promises may bud and blossom into grace, and notions may fire and be inflamed into holy love. The veil is upon my eyes; but my work is to rend off the veil of time from my heart, and to look into eternity; to put back all creatures, and to have all in God, eyes and all; and this is the greatest possession. If I have all things in themselves, I have them but in a finite sphere; but if I have them all in God, I have them eminently, and in a kind of infinity. In waiting, I wait upon the Lord, till he incline and give me eagle's wings of faith and love to soar up to him. Near enough to him I cannot be. O that I were unearthed and unselfed, that my soul might be in perpetual ascensions to him, my love going forth in raptures after him! O for the circumcision of the heart! If the film were off mine eyes, I should see the outward world; but if the flesh were off my heart, I should love the Blessed God, which is infinitely better. Through grace I hope to come to that blessed region, where God is all. *In his light we shall see light*, and in his love we shall be for ever inflamed to him. But I forget myself, and run out, but not beyond the pardon of my good friend.

“ My kind salutes to yourself, and begging all your prayers, I take leave, and subscribe myself,

“ Your obliged friend and servant,

“ EDWARD POLHILL.”

O that there were such a spirit breathing in each of us. Then we should know what it is to receive, enjoy, and improve every temporal mercy as a new covenant blessing.

CASE XVIII.

How may a Christian know that he grows in grace?

IT is a question of some peculiar weight that I have before me. The resolution of it has a tendency to remove the Christian's fears, help him in examining his soul, and to stir him up to a holy diligence and watchfulness in his spiritual course, that he may not be trifling and slothful, but be pressing on *towards the mark*, and so be making some progress in his way to Zion. And here I shall,

I. Make a few observations, that may be necessary to clear this important point. And,

II. Mention a few instances, wherein it will appear, that the Christian, notwithstanding all the opposition he meets with, really grows in grace.

I. I would make a few observations, that may be necessary to clear this important point. And,

1. *Growth in grace is in general imperceptible to the Christian himself.* It is, for the most part, of a very gradual nature; like a plant which grows insensibly; or like a babe, which becomes stronger and taller, till at length he has all the proportions of a man; and yet you see not how this is done. You find in time an alteration, but you cannot perceive the steps by which he approaches nearer and nearer to manhood. Thus it is with the Christian. He is first a babe, being weak in knowledge and grace; then he is a young man, and after that, a father.* These bespeak great improvement; and yet this is in general so gradual, that the Christian is insensible of it. He is at first a plant; but afterwards may be compared to a tree, and so goes on oftentimes, till at length he becomes a tall cedar in Lebanon; and yet the steps by which he ascends to this height in stature are chiefly imperceptible.

2. *Sometimes growth in grace is more quick and visible.*

* The Apostle John addresses Christians according to their rank and standing in religion. He writes to *Babes*, or to those who are young Christians, and therefore weak in faith and understanding; to *Young Men*, or to such as were stronger, more vigorous and lively, and therefore fit to encounter with difficulties; and to *Fathers*, or to those of age and experience in Christianity; in all which he alludes to the different stages of the natural life, from one to the other of which there is a gradual ascent. 1 John ii, 12—18.

God does great work in a little time. Some Christians make great improvements, and come soon to a state of manhood. They ripen apace for a better world, and make great advances in the divine life. When God is as dew to their souls, they revive as the corn, grow as the vine, shoot forth their branches, and make a green and flourishing appearance. "When the sun of righteousness arises upon them with healing under his wings, they go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall," Mal. iv. 2. As the sun in his return from the winter solstice, by his warmth nourishes frozen nature, and makes it look green and beautiful; so when the sun of righteousness, after some long time of withdrawment, comes to shine again upon the soul, he feels the warmth of his reviving beams, and finds a glorious and sudden alteration. He is then like *calves of the stall*, which are fitting for slaughter, and therefore make much quicker improvements than those that are in the open field: the Christian, like them, grows fat, and makes very visible advances in holiness. When God fills the pool of ordinances with his heavenly rain, we are sensible of it, feel the refreshment, and go from strength to strength.

3. *We may, upon the whole, have made some progress in the Christian life, though for the present we may appear to be going backward.* Some corruption may for the present harass our souls, and have led us aside. We may by some neglect or other have *grieved the Holy Spirit*, and he may have left us for a time, and so we may appear to be in a declining and withering condition, though, upon the whole, we may have made some progress in grace, and may have got some cubits added to our spiritual stature, since we gave up ourselves to Christ. A child may have some indisposition, which may prevent his growth for a time; yet he may have got much strength, when compared with what he was at first. David lay asleep some time, and gave no evidences then of any growth in grace; yet doubtless he had made advances in a conformity to God, though now a corruption leads him into captivity. From all this then we learn, that we must not compare ourselves with yesterday, if we would know whether we have got any more steps in our way to heaven. It might be much better with us yesterday than to-day, as to the frame of our souls, and yet we may in general have got some ground. If we would know our growth, we must look back to the time when we first gave up ourselves to the Redeemer, if we can remember it, and compare ourselves now with ourselves then.

4. *We may grow in one respect, though we may not grow*

in all. A tree in winter may appear to be dead; but it is indeed alive, and is gathering strength, though it is not beautified with blossoms, or loaded with fruit. Thus the Christian has his winter seasons, yet he is making some progress. In adversity, when under afflictive dispensations, the buffetings of Satan, under spiritual darkness and discouragements, he may grow, though his faith may not be so strong, his affections so lively, and his soul so comfortable as he could wish. Some dispensations may be more suited to bring one grace into exercise than another. If any grace is strengthened, and we are got in any measure nearer to Christ, we are then growing Christians. Some form to themselves marks and evidences of growth in grace, and if they come not up to that standard, they conclude that they are going backward; whereas, if we grow in one respect, we ought to be thankful, though we do not see that we grow in all.

5. *We are not to judge of our spiritual growth by the growth of others.* Some with whom we are acquainted have perhaps made great advances in grace. They have great knowledge; can reason solidly about the gospel: their zeal is lively, their faith is strong, their hearts appear warm, and they seem to have much communion with God. Because we find not the *same gifts and measures of grace* in ourselves, but perhaps a coldness, a sad indifferency, &c. we are ready to conclude that we have *no grace*, especially that we are far from being *growing Christians*, not considering that there are *different degrees*, in different persons. Nay, we do not consider that these have their corruptions, their inward struggles, their dead seasons, as well as others. Because we are not all *Pauls*, must we therefore say that we are not Christians at all? Because we do not find the same degrees of love to ordinances as David did, must we say that we have none at all? These would be strange and very unfair conclusions. Thus, these things being observed, I now come,

II. To show when the Christian may be said to grow in grace. Amongst other things, I would mention these following: As,

1. *Growth in grace discovers itself in an increase of spiritual light and knowledge.* To see more of sin is (as we have observed under another case) a real sign that the work is carrying on. It was by the light of the spirit alone, that we first saw the wickedness of our hearts, and a loathsomeness in sin; and it is by this light that our views of it grow clearer and more distinct. *When the commandment came*, the boasting

Pharisee saw himself a sinner, Rom. vii. 9. To see more and more of ourselves tends to bring us into a more evangelical frame, and so to make us appear more like the followers of Christ.—As we see more of ourselves, so, as the work is carrying on in us, we see more of Jesus Christ; the greatness and amiableness of his person, the virtue of his sacrifice, the triumphs of his cross, and the importance of his intercession. Upon the whole, when we see more vileness in ourselves, and more beauty in Christ; more of our own emptiness, and of his fulness; more of our own weakness, and of his strength; more of the insufficiency of our own righteousness to justify us before God, and of the glory of his; and, in a word, more of our wretchedness and nakedness, and of his suitableness and excellency, we may be said to grow in grace.

2. *When we are enabled to go more out of ourselves, and depend more upon Christ, we may be said to grow in grace.* The young Christian is ready to place too much dependence upon his frames. If in duties his affections are not sweetly raised, he is ready to conclude such duties to be lost. When he finds a dulness, a contraction, a straitness in his frame, he fears that he has no experience of the grace of God. He is too ready to depend upon his resolutions. When led aside by any corruption, he resolves against it, and goes too much in his own strength. Under spiritual darkness, or afflictive dispensations, he gives too much way to discouragement, and often *refuses to be comforted*. If then we are enabled to lay a stress upon frames, and look more to Christ, leaving our souls with him; if we are more sensible of our weakness, and depend more upon the strength of the Great Redeemer; if, when Satan buffets, and God afflicts, we are enabled to leave ourselves with Christ, pleading his righteousness, and waiting for his salvation; if, under a deeper sense of our emptiness we go to Christ's fulness, cleave to and trust in him, resolving, that if we perish, to perish at his feet, it is a sign that we are growing in grace.

3. *We are making some advances, when we find a true relish for duties, and grow more spiritual in them.* Young Christians have generally more fire than solidity. They are, says Dr. Goodwin, like new musical instruments, they have more varnish than old ones, but they give not so sweet a sound. Their zeal and affection often carry them beyond their duty. They are ready to think that they must pray so often, spend so much time in duties, or they cannot be Christians. But, as they grow in grace, they find a relish for duty, see its great impor-

tance, and attend to it in its proper place. They grow more settled and solid. They have juster conceptions of God. Their obedience flows more from love. Their services are more evangelical. They attend to duty more in its proper season, and give every duty its just weight. When indeed we find a growing coldness to duty, an indifference, carelessness and negligence, we have reason to fear a decline; but when we have a true relish for duties, and are more spiritual in them, it is a sign we are making progress in holiness.

4. *We make advances in grace, when we are more humble, submissive, and thankful.* An humble frame is that which the whole gospel is calculated to bring us into, and which the Spirit by all his works in us promotes. The more we are sunk in our own apprehensions then, the lower we lie, the more detestable we appear, and the more we show of the Christian. —The growing Christian has more of an humble submission to the dispensations of providence. When afflictions first come upon us, we are like *bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke*; our proud rebellious hearts are ready to rise against God, but, as we make advances, we are brought to justify God, and to acquiesce in all his proceedings.—“Lord, this proud heart would fain rebel; but, oh, take thine own way with me, *Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* I would be dumb, not opening my mouth against any part of thy conduct, but cheerfully giving up myself and my all to thy disposal, saying, Choose my inheritance for me.” —As the Christian grows, he is brought into a more thankful and admiring frame. He admires the riches of grace, and this is more and more his language:—“Lord, why me? why was my name enrolled in the book of life? Why didst thou call, renew, and sanctify me? Am I an heir of God? Will heaven be my inheritance? Oh, the grace, the infinite grace and compassion of God!” &c.—This is the very frame of the saints in heaven. Who more humble than they are, who more thankful? They are ever adoring divine grace, placing the crown upon their Redeemer’s head, and giving God all the glory, Rev. v. 9—13. The more therefore we are brought into this frame, the greater progress we are making in the Christian life.

5. *We grow in grace, when we find our corruptions weaker, and the power of sin more and more subdued in us.* There was a time, Christian, when thy poor, silly, foolish, heart was ready to fall in with every temptation; when thy corruptions were strong, and often leading thee into captivity. But hast

thou by divine grace got a greater freedom from them? Hast thou been enabled to mourn over them, pray against them, and to bring them to the cross of Christ, and get them mortified and slain? Do not pride, passion, envy, discontent, and carnality, reign as much as usual? Art thou then more upon thy guard, and dost thou find thy soul more at liberty, than before? *This is a sign of growth in grace.*

Finally, *When we find less of an earthly, and more of a heavenly disposition, we may be said to grow in grace.* When our esteem for this world is sinking, our attachment to it weaker; when our affections are often withdrawn from it, and we find greater desires to converse with God, and to look above; when heaven grows more pleasing and familiar, and we, something like the inhabitants above, are filled with a warmer zeal for God, and desire to honour him by a more active and lively obedience; when we find a growing concern to be dead to present things, and to have a greater love to Jesus, a stronger faith in him, and an increasing conformity to him, we may comfortably conclude that we grow in grace.—I would conclude this subject by a reflection or two. And,

1. *How awful is their case, who are absolute strangers to the grace of God!* To be conformed to God is the greatest happiness of a creature. What can render us more amiable, than to have the divine image in us; what can more contribute to our real felicity? It is heaven to be like Christ. 1 John iii. 2. It is absolutely necessary to our communion with him here on earth, to our full enjoyment of him above. You then, who are strangers to the new creature, have no degree of fitness for a better world. What could heaven be to you, but a tiresome place! Could you exult in God as your highest happiness? Could you join the church triumphant in cheerful, unwearied, and everlasting ascriptions of praise to God and to the Lamb? Sit but down, and seriously consider this, and thou must soon be convinced that thy hopes of happiness are absolutely vain, inasmuch as thou art under the power of sin, hast no relish for spiritual services, and consequently no real fitness for heaven. Let me beseech thee to consider thy present dangerous and awful condition; and oh, seek to be a Christian indeed, that thou mayest not be pleasing thyself with expectations of salvation, and at last meet with a disappointment. This has been the case with many. *They thought themselves rich, and increased with goods, when they were poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.* They rejected every admonition, turned off every exhortation from themselves,

and would not believe the awful truth, that they were *children of wrath*, and *dead in trespasses and sins*; but cried, *Peace, peace*, till sudden and everlasting destruction came upon them, and it was too late to seek for grace, and look for mercy. This, deplorable as it is, will be thy condition, O graceless soul, if death should come upon thee, whilst thou art persuading thyself that all is well. Let me beseech thee, therefore, to consider the things that belong to thy peace before they are for ever hid from thine eyes. To be summoned before the tribunal of God, there to be weighed, and pronounced too light; to hear the awful word, *Depart*; to see the bottomless pit opening, and no way to escape, no deliverer near; but to see the now-compassionate Jesus then refusing to stretch forth his arm to help thee, to hear him crying, “Thou infatuated creature, thou art ruined for ever: I once called, but thou didst refuse; I once stretched out my hand, but thou didst not regard it; I now will laugh at thy calamity, and mock, now thy fear cometh upon thee; thou mayest now call, but I will not answer; thou mayest seek me earnestly, but thou shalt not find me.”—Oh think, think, I entreat thee, of this melancholy and distressing scene; and let a consideration of it engage thee to look into thy heart, and to seek with the utmost diligence after an experience of the grace of God, to fit thee for the enjoyments above, and after an interest in the righteousness of Christ, to give thee a title to them. Give God no rest, but earnestly beg, that he would send his Spirit to make every thing new in thy heart, proclaim liberty to thy captive soul, lead thee to the feet of the almighty Redeemer, and prepare thee for the enjoyment of him.

2. *We see what should be our great concern as Christians.* Not to be grasping after honour, riches, and the emoluments of earth and time; not to gratify our appetites in the pleasures of sense, but to be pursuing the glory of God, and the prosperity of our souls. Is this, Christian, what thou hast daily in view? Whilst thou art attending to the affairs of thy family, art thou not neglecting thy soul? Dost thou ever inquire whether that is starving, or flourishing? Is it thy greatest care to grow in grace? Art thou watchful therefore against every sin, much in prayer, frequent in meditation and self-examination; and art thou looking to Christ daily, for all suitable supplies, to enable thee to make advances? Is it matter of humiliation, that thou findest so much of the body of sin within thee, such coldness to duties, such degrees of ignorance, so much carnality, spiritual pride, &c.? Dost thou mourn

before the Lord, that there is so little of a divine temper, of thy Redeemer's image in thee? Dost thou breathe after holiness, pray earnestly for the Spirit of sanctification to cleanse thy heart, and add some cubits to thy spiritual stature? To live a natural life only, is not to live: it is only to breathe. Ye slothful Christians, awake, and consider,—your character, your happiness, your usefulness, all call upon you to seek after progress in grace. Oh, may this be your motto, *For me to live is Christ!* Seek after more of Christ with you, and in you. Be not contented to be always babes, but be thirsting after an increase of strength, of knowledge, of faith, of love, of every grace, that it may be evident to all that you are not only Christians indeed, but that your souls are in a healthy and prosperous condition, and that it is your greatest delight to be growing in holiness and usefulness.

3. *If we have any reason to hope that we are growing in grace, we should ascribe all the glory to God. He is the author and finisher of faith,* Heb. xii. 2. The same grace that said unto us, *Live*, continues this life. The same power that brought us first to God, must be still exerted, or else we shall soon return to folly. It is not enough for grace to be implanted; the Spirit must help us to bring it into exercise. Has any corruption been subdued, any victory been gained, any progress been made in thy race, any cubit added to thy stature? It is God who has done it. *The smoking flax would soon be quenched, and the bruised reed entirely broke*, if God was not to stand by thee, and help thee. *Thy salvation is all of grace.* Grace chose thee from eternity, grace called thee in time, grace sanctifies thee, and carries thee on from strength to strength; and at last the same free grace will finish the work, and bring thee into the immediate presence of God. No wonder then, the saints will for ever sing, *Grace, grace.* May we learn the song here, and walk under a deep sense of unmerited grace, till we come to that world, where we shall put the crown upon our Redeemer's head, and ascribe unwearied and everlasting praises to him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb.

4. *How glorious must heaven be where that work, which God begins and carries on here, will be perfect!* The end of ordinances is for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, Eph. iv. 11, &c. We are at best but babes here, when compared

with what we shall be. We are now under age, and have our inheritance in prospect, not in possession. Here we are fatigued with numberless conflicts and struggles with sin and Satan. Now and then we get a victory, but again we are overcome. We make but slow progress in our way. It is difficult to get near to God, and to grow into his likeness. "But see, my soul, heaven is before thee,—heaven, where all thy corruptions will be perfectly destroyed, and thou wilt have no more enemies to contend with, no more victories to gain, no more struggles with thy own heart, but the conquest will be fully thine and the top-stone will be laid in thy salvation. See, heaven is just at hand; where the new creature will be perfect, and appear in its beautiful and just proportions; where thy understanding will be freed from all the remains of darkness, thy will be in sweet and everlasting subjection to God, and that heart glow and burn with the purest flame of divine love. O happy hour! Desirable period, when I shall put off the body of sin, and start into perfection in a moment! when I shall no longer see through a glass, darkly, but face to face; when I shall no longer be a babe in Christ, but a perfect man." Awake, ye saints, lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Get upon mount *Pisgah*, and view the heavenly land, where your weary souls will be at everlasting rest, and all your longings will be eternally satisfied with the most perfect and exalted enjoyments.

CASE XIX.

How may a deserted believer find out the particular sin or sins, whereby he has grieved the Spirit of God?

THIS is doubtless a most searching and experimental question, wherein there is a necessity for the greatest faithfulness to be used, both by him who resolves it, and by him who attempts to make use of it for himself. In many cases it seems very difficult to point out to a soul under declensions, what is the particular reason of the Spirit's withdrawal. How-

ever, I shall attempt to bring this matter as close home as I possibly can, recommending myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

We must indeed acknowledge that the Lord may, for wise and holy ends, withdraw from his people those comforts and quickenings which they have been favoured with, and that without any immediate respect unto any particular sin or sins committed by them. Sometimes this withdrawment is rather for the prevention of sin, or for the discovery of sin, than as a punishment for it. But generally divine withdrawments are in consequence of some iniquity, whereby the Holy Spirit has been grieved; and it is the duty and business of every gracious soul, when he finds himself deprived of these tokens of divine love, which he hath usually enjoyed, to ask this serious question, *Why does the Lord thus contend with me?* And on all such occasions he has reason to suspect *himself*, as being the proper cause of his complaints. Thus the holy Psalmist seems to maintain a godly jealousy over himself, when he says, Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

The question under consideration may be placed in this familiar and soul-searching light: a believer that has been used to walk in the light of God's countenance, and under the quickening influences of his Spirit, now finds that these comforts are withdrawn from his soul, and does not experience such a spirituality of frame as he used to do. He now feels himself in a declining condition, his faith weak, his comforts low, his graces not ready for exercise. And notwithstanding all his attempts by prayer and endeavour, he cannot arrive at that spirituality and comfort of soul, which he once enjoyed; and therefore cries out with Job, *Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shone upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness!* c. xxix. 2, 3. Or, as the same holy person at another time, *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left-hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right-hand, that I cannot see him.* c. xxiii. 8, 9. This becomes a matter of sad complaint, and the believer wants to know the reason why it is thus with him. Feeling that the Spirit is withdrawn, he sees the greatest reason to suspect that the Spirit has been grieved by him. When he comes to search, he perhaps, so far as he knows himself, is conscious that he has been kept

from gross immoralities and enormities; for which reason he cannot be certain what are the particular sins for which he is thus visited. If indeed, upon reflection, the believer finds that he is fallen into some grievous sin either of heart or life; in such a case he cannot but know the reason of the visitation. Thus David, after the commission of that complicated sin of murder and adultery in the matter of Uriah, could not but see the reason of the present declensions of his frame, and the present decay of his comforts; and therefore cries out, Ps. li. 11—14. *Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.* Now then, if you are conscious to yourselves of any enormity in your practice, or any wilful neglect of duty, do not wonder, if the quickening and comforting influences of the divine Spirit are awfully suspended. We have a general rule laid down, 1 John i. 6, 7. which should be attended to with great concern in the present case. It consists of two parts; the first is mentioned in the 6th verse: *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.* The second part is contained in the 7th verse: *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* From whence we may observe, that all those comforts are delusive, which are consistent with the love and practice of sin; and that those who are inclined to walk closely with God, may expect delightful communion with him. But the present case stands in this light: thou perhaps dost not feel that delight and pleasure in spiritual duties, nor that spirituality of frame which thou wert wont to enjoy. From whence thou very justly suspectest, that the Spirit has been some way or other grieved by thee; but thou canst not be certain in what manner it has been done, because thy conscience does not charge thee with any gross immorality and defects. It is true, upon inspection thou seest abundance of corruption in thy heart, but canst not point out the particular sin or corruption, which is the ground of thy present complaint. Thou wouldst therefore be glad to know how to discover it, on purpose that the sin may be brought to the cross of Christ, in order to be crucified.

In answer to this question, doubtless, the first and grand direction is this, to set about the duty of self-examination.

O disconsolate believer, ransack thine own heart, look through it, look into it as deep as thou canst; and while thou art thus upon the search, beg of God that he would examine and prove thee, that he would try thy reins and thy heart. But it may be, that thou hast been thus searching and inquiring, and art still at a loss to fix thine eye upon that particular for which thou art visited. You will then ask, what rule can now be given? and will be ready to say, that if you yourselves cannot find it out by self-examination, how is it possible that any other should be able to do it? But yet I will venture at it, and would endeavour to act the most faithful and searching part, and then leave the whole to your own consciences to judge. Let me therefore give you three or four directions, whereby you may be able to fix your eyes upon the particular sins for which the Lord withdraws from you. And,

1. I say, the *sin which was the immediate cause of your present declensions, and which most prevails under them*, is very likely to be the reason of the present awful visitation. Look back, therefore, and observe the time and manner in which you fell into this declining, uncomfortable way. Perhaps just at the time when your darkness began, you had some impatience under the divine hand, or perhaps you was left to slight or abuse those quickenings and comforts which you were favoured with. The spouse in the Canticles seems to be sensible, that this must be the sin by which the Spirit is grieved, Cant. ii. 7. *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please.* You had been for a time favoured with the divine presence, and the light of his countenance; but you began to grow wanton upon these spiritual privileges, to be careless about them, or to grow remiss in your duty under the enjoyment of them, or perhaps at this time you gave way to the rising of some particular corruption; and immediately upon this the Spirit withdrew, and left you in darkness and distress, or under coldness and indifference: if so, you may be very certain, that this was the particular crime which grieved the Spirit.

And further, take notice what is that sin which most prevails under your present declensions. This you will be able to learn by a little inspection. And it is generally found, that the sin which causes the desertion is that which continues it: and as it has gained such an advantage as to drive the Spirit away, it now rages and triumphs, and grows stronger and stronger,

under these calamitous experiences; whereby you may know, that this is the sin which lies at the bottom of your present complaints.

2. *The sin*, whatever it be, *which you are now for alleviating and excusing*, you have great reason to think is that which caused and continues the divine withdrawment. It may be, that under your present darkness you look into your own heart and ways, and find a great many corruptions working, and sins prevailing, in your souls. The more you look, the more you see the corruption of your own hearts, the abominations that are working within you; and those things appear in such multitudes, that you know not which to fix upon, as the particular cause of your declensions. And after all your searches, it is not at all improbable, you may overlook the very thing you are seeking after. For those sins and corruptions which you are most ready to fix upon, are such as you are sensible of, lament under, strive and pray against; and these, however they may have caused, yet do not continue the divine desertion. Those sins which your souls are for magnifying, and for which you are perpetually accusing yourselves, you have the least reason to suspect; because so far as you thus see your sins, it is a happy token that the Spirit is present with you, as a Spirit of humiliation. Look therefore further, and see whether you are not making some excuse for, or alleviating some of these evils which are in your heart and life; whether you are not for making them as little as possible, and endeavouring to throw off the guilt of them from yourselves. Now, then, as soon as you can observe this disposition with respect to any iniquity, you may immediately charge the fault upon that particular sin. For instance: Have you been guilty of neglecting, or slightly performing secret, family, or public duties? Have you been negligent in keeping the Sabbath, or careless in the public or private exercises of God's worship? Or have you conformed to any of the vices and vanities of the world? Perhaps in these cases your hearts are saying, "It is true, I have occasionally neglected secret prayer, or I have in some little instances conformed to ways of the world; but this is no great matter. I neglected secret prayer, because my heart was not in a frame for it, or because I had not a clear opportunity for it; and I have given into the ways of the world, because there was some sort of necessity for it." And thus your minds palliate your offences; you are inclined to excuse your negligence or indifference; which plainly shows, that these sins have gained and retain an awful prevalency in you; and therefore you may

take it for granted, that these are the iniquities for which you now are visited.

3. *Those sins in your heart and life, which you find the greatest unwillingness to oppose*, are the sins which cause or continue the withdrawalment. There are many corruptions working, and many temptations assailing, to bring you into that which is contrary to the law or gospel. Some of these you can fight, strive, watch, and pray against; others of them are so pleasing to your flesh, or so suited to your inclinations, that you cannot find in your heart to make a vigorous resistance against them: you may then take it for granted, that these latter lie at the foundation of your spiritual complaints.

4. *The sins which you are ashamed or unwilling heartily to confess before the Lord*, are those by which the Spirit is grieved. Look attentively into your own hearts, and perhaps you will find there is a sin committed or indulged by you, which you are for keeping secret in your own bosom. You cannot confess it with a true freedom and sincerity; and, as you are attempting to enumerate your transgressions before the Lord in a way of confession, perhaps there is one (or two) starts up in your remembrance, which you find yourselves unwilling to acknowledge to be so sinful as it really is, and as your conscience and judgment inform you it is. In this case, you know in your own conscience that you cannot frankly confess the sin before God; because your heart is wedded to it, and you are unwilling to part with it. If it be thus, you need no longer be at a loss to know what it is that hides the light of God's countenance from you. But could you now without reserve pray and plead, and watch and strive against that sin which you find thus cleaving to your soul, you would probably be immediately delivered, and find the Spirit of life and comfort restored to you. We have a clear instance of this in Psalm xxxii. 5. where we find the Psalmist had been withholding himself from a frank confession; and so long as he thus kept silence, his guilt and his distress remained and increased; but as soon as ever he said in his heart, *I will confess my transgression to the Lord*, then God forgave him the iniquity of his sin.

Thus I have endeavoured, in the plainest and most faithful manner I could, to lead you to the knowledge of those sins, which are the causes of your spiritual complaints. And it is very evident, from the nature of the thing, that these must be the sins that separate between you and your God. For those iniquities that you truly hate, that you lament under, that you desire to confess before the Lord, and to carry to the cross of

Christ to be crucified there, are not the sins that maintain the distance between God and you : but those iniquities, whether spiritual or external, whether in heart or life, which you have such an affection for, that you cannot heartily condemn yourselves for them, cannot confess without reserve before the Lord, that you cannot find in your hearts to oppose with vigour, these must of necessity cause a continued distance between God and your souls. These are the iniquities which are peculiarly provoking to God, these are the sins that harden the heart, that benumb the conscience, and tarnish the soul. And remember, that you can never expect a return of the divine quickenings and comforts, until you can lay your hand upon these sins, can heartily pray against them, and can fly to the Lord Jesus Christ to have them pardoned and subdued.

Permit me to conclude this soul-searching subject by a few necessary and important advices upon the whole.

1. *Beware of extenuating or excusing any sin. He that hideth his sins shall not prosper.* But yet this is what we are very prone to. When we are under a temptation to any neglects of duty, our corrupt hearts will appear very ready to find out many excuses. They will suggest to us, either that the duty is too hard for us to undertake, or that we have not an opportunity for it, or that there will be no great advantage reaped by it. Thus we are often betrayed into a criminal omission of what the Lord calls for from us. And no wonder then, if the Spirit be grieved, and we soon feel the sad effects of indulging spiritual sloth ; no wonder, if our communion with God be interrupted, if corruption gains an advantage, and a shyness between God and our souls be produced.

Again, when we are prevailed upon to neglect an incumbent duty, our corrupt hearts will now proceed to alleviate the fault, and to make many excuses for it, in order to hinder us from a free acknowledgment of it, and repentance for it ; and so we grow more and more hardened and careless, whereby the grieved Spirit is still more grieved, and the separation between God and our souls is continued and widened.

The same may be said concerning a temptation to the commission of sin. Our carnal hearts will represent the iniquity as very small, or as very pleasant, in order to induce us to comply with the temptation ; and when we are actually drawn away by our own lusts, and enticed ; then lust, having conceived, bringeth forth sin, and sin, being finished, bringeth forth death. O the dreadful tendency of excusing and alleviating sin !

It is this sad disposition in unrenewed persons, that keeps

them under the dominion of their own lusts: it is this prevents them from seeing the danger of their state: it is this likewise that makes them continually careless, without an interest in Christ's grace and righteousness; and deludes their souls with many vain and dangerous hopes.

The same inclination, when it appears, and in any measure prevails, in a gracious person, is peculiarly provoking to God, and effectually robs him of all his comforts and spirituality, makes him grow more and more carnal, and so produces and promotes divine withdrawments.

Let us all therefore beware of extenuating any iniquity; and let us rather endeavour to aggravate it to ourselves, and before God. It is true, that to aggravate our own sins, is very disagreeable to flesh and blood, and often occasions a diminution to our pleasure. But yet it is a necessary work; necessary to our true humiliation, and necessary to keep us in the love and under the smiles of our gracious God: None have a stronger view of the sinfulness of sin, than those who walk closely and comfortably with God.

2. *Be watchful against the devices of Satan, and the deceitfulness of your own hearts.* We cannot have a stronger call to this necessary duty, than what may be deduced from the foregoing discourse. For here we see, that the devil and our own hearts will use all possible means to conceal from us the particular sins that are the most detrimental and dangerous to our souls. Are we afflicted in our persons, or distressed in our minds, and under the evident marks of divine displeasure? Satan and our corrupt natures join to perplex us so, that we should not know wherefore it is that the Lord contends with us. Our perplexed minds will now be for condemning us for every other sin besides that which lies at the bottom of our spiritual distresses; and our unbelief will attempt to drive us into desperation, because of those corruptions we see, lament, and pray against; while the foundation of the controversy between God and our souls lie hid under a criminal excuse. See here a most remarkable evidence, that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* See here the necessity of a narrow inspection, and of divine illumination, in order to attain the knowledge of our own case, and of the ground of our complaints. *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.* By a thorough search, according to the foregoing rules, joined with prayer for divine teachings, you may be led to see the sin that most easily besets you, and that has gained the greatest strength in your souls.

3. Having found out the particular sin or sins which cause or continue the distance between God and your souls, now endeavour to lay it to heart as most abominable and detrimental. The least sin excused and alleviated by us becomes thereby a most grievous abomination. Observe therefore how it has worked, and does work, in your souls. Has it not polluted your souls, weakened your graces, taken away your spiritual strength and enjoyment? Does not this indulged or extenuated sin, be it what it will, destroy the sincerity of your confessions, and the uprightness of your prayers? Can you frankly acknowledge, or heartily pray against that iniquity which your hearts cleave to, and which they would fain countenance? Surely no. Again, consider how provoking it must be to a gracious God to find you harbouring his enemy in your bosom, to find you wishing that it may be spared or winked at. Surely you cannot wonder if the Lord withdraws from you. He does it justly; you oblige him to it; and he never will, never honourably can, restore his comforts to you, until you are brought to hate, confess, and bewail it before him. O beg therefore that the divine Spirit would *convince* you of sin, and show you more and more the sinfulness of that particular iniquity and indulgence that lies nearest your heart, that you may see how abominable it is, as well as feel how detrimental it is!

4. *Bring the iniquity to the cross of Christ, to be crucified there.* Sin will live every-where but under the cross of Christ. You may see your sin, may strive, watch, and pray against it, and it will still prevail, to maintain the separation between God and you, until you are directed to exercise faith in the blood of Christ for the forgiveness and mortification of it. *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts*, Gal. v. 24.

But you will, it may be, ask, What is it to bring sin to Christ's cross, and to crucify it there? I answer, it contains the following things:

1. *To behold the sinfulness of sin, in the death of Christ.* You may see much of the evil of it, by looking into the holy law, and observing its polluting effect upon our own hearts: but such sights of sin, by themselves, will not subdue it. Look upon the cross of Christ; behold him suffering, bleeding, dying, and under his Father's withdrawment, for sin imputed to him: there you may look and wonder, look and mourn, look and raise your indignation against sin in the strongest manner. This will be a most effectual means of making you

to be truly ashamed of it, and to mourn for it with a godly, an evangelical sorrow.

2. *To account every indulged sin in you as crucifying the Son of God afresh.* By giving way to iniquity, by harbouring it in your bosoms, or by casting a pleasing glance upon the abominable thing, you are guilty, not only of breaking the law, but of undervaluing the blood of the covenant. What! Did Christ die for sin, and shall you indulge it? Surely this would be doing what lies in your power to bring him down, and nail him upon the cross afresh. Oh, could we but have such conceptions of sin indulged, they would greatly tend to set our hearts at the utmost distance from it!

3. *It is to cast the guilt of our sin upon the atonement of Christ, by faith.* Do we now see ourselves very guilty and filthy? Are we ashamed of ourselves, and enabled to abhor ourselves, because of our abominations? Now surely we cannot but experimentally conceive, that nothing short of an infinite atonement can procure remission. Behold therefore the atonement Christ has made; see how satisfactory it is to divine justice, see how sufficient it is for our pardon: and let us now endeavour to answer the challenges of a guilty conscience by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus we shall receive a divine pardon to our consciences; thus we shall receive peace and reconciliation with God. And then we shall find him restoring comforts to us, restoring the joys of his salvation, and the quickenings of his free Spirit.

How unhappy is the believer, while he lies under the guilt of unpardoned sin, and while the corruption and unbelief of his heart keeps him back from a free confession of it! He has now lost all enjoyment of himself, all communion with God, and all special pleasure in, or profit by, his ordinances. He now *sinks in deep mire, where there is no standing*; he is now *come into deep waters, where the floods overflow him*. But when he is enabled to see his sin, guilt, and impurity, and to disburden his conscience by an application to the blood of Christ, O then his soul is eased, his heart purified, his spiritual liberty restored, and a gracious God returns to him in loving kindness, and tender mercies.

CASE XX.

How should we read the word of God, so as may be for his glory, and the advantage of our souls?

THIS is a question of no small moment. It relates to a duty incumbent upon all who are favoured with the word of God: a duty too much neglected by professing Christians, though so peculiarly calculated to promote our spiritual advantage, and often made effectual for that purpose. The person who sent in the question appears to be in some perplexity how to discharge his duty, so as to get some spiritual profit. I will give you his own words.

“ I AM under some uneasiness concerning the word of God. I hope I love to hear it opened; to hear of that glorious Saviour exhibited therein, and that satisfaction he has made to justice; but, as to reading it, what coldness do I find in that duty! I sometimes appear to delight in that duty; but if I try to meditate on the word read, how sadly do my thoughts wander! So that it is but little that I understand of it. I know not what method to take in reading; whether it would be most useful to begin at the beginning, and so go regularly on. Besides, there is a great part I know not the meaning of. I have often heard of the glorious promises there; but when I meet with them, am afraid to take the comfort of them, lest I should be deceiving myself with false hopes. I have sometimes, before I read the word, put up a few petitions, that I might read and meditate on it with advantage; but, alas! I have so carelessly attended to it, that I have thought at times I had better omit these petitions. In this perplexity therefore I should be glad of your directions, and of your answer to the above question.”

IN this case you find the experience of many, and the question given is of great importance, and is worthy of our consideration, as it may be useful, by a divine blessing, both to our direction and quickening. As there are numbers in this gospel land who never look into the Bible; so many of those who read it, do it in such a manner, as to receive little or no profit by it. Some read it as a task; others in a careless,

eustomary manner, thinking they have done enough, if they have but gone through a chapter or two, though they have hurried through it without consideration, or read it when half asleep. If you thus read the word of God, you cannot expect any great advantage from it; for when we trifle with God in duties, we provoke him to withdraw his Spirit, and to withhold his blessing.

The directions I shall give for the profitable reading the Scriptures will be most particularly suitable to your closet retirements; for I hope that you, who look upon prayer as one part, look upon reading as another important part of closet duty. Permit me therefore to suggest to you the following directions.

1. *Read the word with prayer.* Prayer is one of the great means of bringing down the divine blessing upon all ordinances and duties to our spiritual edification. It is a means of preparing our hearts for other duties, and of enabling us to get good from them. It would be well for prayer to go before reading. However, if circumstances will not permit you to spend some time in this duty before you read the word, do not absolutely neglect it; but send up a few petitions to God, that he would prepare your heart for the work that lies before you; open your eyes, that you may understand the Scriptures; and accompany reading with a divine blessing, that it may answer some valuable purpose in your soul, either to enlighten, quicken, or comfort, or in some way or other to promote your spiritual good. When you consider these things, you cannot but see the propriety of prayer *before* reading. But *especially accompany reading with prayer.* Do not think you have done all that is incumbent upon you, when you have read the scripture either in the family or the closet. Pray it over before God. Have you been reading any promises of spiritual blessings? Plead them with God. Has the chapter been representing *the odiousness of sin*, its *dreadful consequences*, the *falls of God's people*, and the *salvation of the chief of sinners*? Beg that your eyes may be opened to see the malignity of sin, the wickedness of your heart, and that you may be kept from those evils which many have fallen into, and be enabled to admire the riches of free grace in the salvation of creatures so unworthy, and in your own in particular. Have you been reading of the *privileges of God's children* here, and the *glory* they shall have hereafter; or have you been taking a view of the *various duties* in their respective relations and circumstances in life, or of their *various experiences*, and of the dealings of

God with them? Beg that your heart may be suitably affected with such representations, that you may be encouraged in your christian course, quickened to run your race, confirmed in your belief of the reality of religion, and be enabled to continue, till you receive the end of your faith, even your complete and everlasting salvation. Has the chapter been representing the Mediator, his *glorious person*, his *important offices*, his *amazing love*, the *triumph of his cross*, or his *qualifications* for the great work he has undertaken, and therefore his *all-sufficiency* to save? Be earnest with God, that you may be enabled to leave yourself with this Jesus, may be sprinkled with his blood, have a share in all the blessings he has purchased, and that his love may ever endear him to your souls, kindle the sacred fire in your breasts, and engage you to walk before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of your life. Thus let reading be *accompanied with prayer*. Remember, the scripture is full of important mysteries, which we cannot see the beauty of, unless the Spirit opens the eyes of our understandings. Our hearts are naturally full of *prejudices* against the glorious contents of scripture, and therefore we want the Spirit to remove these, and to give us a true relish for the great truths of revelation; and impress them powerfully upon our minds to our salvation. They that neglect prayer and depend upon their *own judgment and skill* to guide them in matters of everlasting moment, have no reason to expect the Spirit's teachings, and are therefore liable to fall into every error, even those that will prove eternally destructive to their highest interest. Pray therefore for *divine direction*, for *divine quickenings*, that what you read may be a means of bringing you nearer to God, and of promoting your everlasting advantage. Finally, earnestly pray that whilst you are *beholding the glory of the Lord in the glass of his word*, you may be *changed into his image, from glory to glory!* and may find those truths you are reading properly impressing, warming, and establishing your hearts, that you may be growing in the image of your Redeemer, and be training up for a glorious and everlasting world above!

2. *Observe some order in reading the word, and make use of those helps that may be necessary to your understanding it.* This person is at a loss to determine, whether he shall begin with the Bible, and so go regularly through it, or not. This seems to be the best method to observe at your *stated times* of reading; and it will not prevent your looking into other parts of scripture, when you have opportunity. This method will

give you a view of the great events which the scripture mentions, and of the various circumstances of the church from period to period, and of God's dealings with them. By this means you have a regular view of things, as they appeared, from the creation, down to Christ, and his Apostles. You will hereby have a greater insight into scripture history and chronology, which will be both entertaining and useful, and keep your ideas of things relating to persons and facts distinct and clear. This person further says, *there is a great part of scripture he does not understand*. You should read the scripture therefore with an *exposition* or *paraphrase*.* This will open the text to you, show you the connexion, the design, the meaning, and so furnish you with matter for serious meditation. What end will it answer for you to read this sacred volume, and not understand it? If it is a *sealed book*, it is like to be *useless*.—Upon the whole, though you may understand some parts, yet there are others, that will appear mysterious, and will remain so, to your great disadvantage in reading, unless you have some interpreter to help you to understand their meaning.

3. *You should be concerned to read the word of God with great seriousness and attention, and a real desire to have the contents of it impressed upon your mind, that you may be fitted more for glorifying God in every character and station.* If you run through a chapter or two in a hasty, cursory manner, you cannot expect much advantage. You should be concerned to attend with the utmost care and diligence, as well as with the greatest seriousness. A sense of the *glorious Author*, and of the *subject matter* of Scripture, should fill you with a peculiar awe, and command a reverence. It is the *word of God*; it comes with a *Thus saith the Lord*, has his image instamped upon it, and is his message to you concerning things of everlasting moment. It is not designed to amuse us with trifling and empty speculations, or divert us with romantic stories; it contains things of a far nobler and more sublime nature, even things that concern our everlasting peace. It reveals the *transactions of eternity* concerning the salvation of man.

* It is an unspeakable privilege that we have such a variety of these both upon the Old and New Testament. Permit me to recommend that excellent paraphrase of *Dr. Guise's upon the New Testament*, when you are reading that part of scripture, on account of its clearness, fulness, and yet conciseness, as well as from the experience I have had myself of its peculiar usefulness; also, that truly valuable Commentary on the Old and New Testament, by the esteemed MATTHEW HENRY. *Messrs Burder and Hughes have favoured the Public with an improved edition of the latter work.*

It represents the *fall*, with all its melancholy consequences; our *state by nature*, how wretched and deplorable! It sets forth the *riches of divine grace* in the appointing a Saviour, and in the method taken to bring about our redemption and salvation. It shows us the *encouragements* we have to apply to the Redeemer for all saving blessings, represents the *nature, variety, and excellency* of them, the *happiness* of the saints in heaven, the *triumphs* and *solemnity* of the great day, the *sentence* that will be passed upon the wicked, and the *awful execution* of it in hell. It is full of *promises* on the one hand, and *threatenings* on the other, and therefore calls for the greatest seriousness and attention in those that read it. It is designed to be a means of our *sanctification*, and so to fit us for the heavenly world, and therefore we should seriously attend to it. And lastly, it is *that word* by which we must be *judged*. This is the grand book that will be opened; according to *this*, will the sentence be passed, and all the opportunities we have had of reading and hearing it, but not improved, will appear against us, if found strangers to Jesus, and aggravate our condemnation. *How seriously, reverently, and attentively then should we read this sacred word!* In fine, when we read the Scripture, it should be with views and desires of feeling its power, and tasting its sweetness, that our *minds* may be more *enlightened* by it, and our *souls* more *established*; that our *corruptions* may be more *mortified*, and our *graces* more *quickened* and *strengthened*; that our *doubts* may be more *removed*, and our *souls* be *supported* under all the difficulties of life; that the *promises* may be more and more *our joy*, *heaven* be more in *our eye*, and we be set a longing more after the full and everlasting enjoyment of God above.

4. *Reading the word of God should be accompanied with meditation and self-examination.* Reading alone will be of little service. Food taken into the stomach will answer no valuable purpose, unless it is digested. Meditation is a digesting spiritual things, and turning them into nourishment to our souls. By this we extract honey from every truth, and so get some additions made to our knowledge and experience. It is a means of humbling, quickening, and establishing our souls, and of kindling a fire in our affections. Whilst the Psalmist was musing the fire burned, Ps. xxxix. 3. How often, in meditation upon what the Christian has been reading, has he found his affections raised, and his soul brought in some measure near to God? How often, whilst musing, has he been filled with an indifference to this world, hatred of sin, self-

abhorrence, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, admiration of his rich and infinite grace, warm desires after the enjoyments above, and satisfying views of an interest in them? By meditation the word takes deeper root in us, makes a more powerful impression on our minds, and furnisheth us with matter for prayer. As often as you read, be concerned to meditate upon it.—*Examine* yourself too by it, and see what concern you have with it, what influence it has had upon you, and how you may improve it. Have you been reading any of the marks and characters of the people of God, the graces of the Spirit? Inquire whether you have found any of them in your own soul. Has the chapter been representing some of the doctrines of Christianity? Examine what knowledge you have of them, how they suit your experience, and what use you may make of them for humiliation, encouragement, &c. Have you been reading of the love of God in the various parts of redemption and salvation by Christ Jesus? *Here is a theme for your meditation; here is a call for examination.* Inquire whether it has ever affected your heart, raised your admiration, and kindled a sacred flame in your soul. Finally, Compare your heart with what you read; see whether it is not your case that is represented, and endeavour by meditation upon, and a self-application of it, to get some spiritual advantage from it. To these directions I may add,

5. *Read the word of God frequently.* The oftener you read the Scriptures, the more benefit you are likely to receive. Let the Bible be your *companion*. Be much conversant with it. Consult it upon all occasions. In every difficulty, when you want quickening, direction, comfort, or establishment, look into the sacred word. Let it be your daily practice to read it, as by this means you will get a growing acquaintance with it, its various mysteries, the duties it represents, the encouragements and direction it gives you in every case; and so, by a divine blessing, will have your knowledge and experience increased, your graces confirmed and strengthened, and your way made easy and pleasant through this difficult wilderness. I shall now close with two reflections.

1. *What reason have we to be thankful for the scriptures, and the free use of them!* When we consider the divine authority of this book, view its important discoveries, its peculiar usefulness, and how many are deprived of it, we have reason to admire infinite grace that we enjoy it, and should ever esteem it as the choicest of our treasures. We have great reason to be thankful, that God is delivering us from time to time from popery, as by this means our sacred privileges are

continued to us, and we have the free use of the Bible, have it in our own houses, as well as in the house of God, and can examine it upon all occasions, and try every doctrine by this divine standard. These must not be ranked amongst the least of our mercies; they are of great importance, and call for our highest and our united praises.

2. *What matter of lamentation is it, that this sacred book is so much neglected, and how inexcusable must such for ever be!* There are many families, it is to be feared, in this land, who have not so much as a Bible in their houses; nor do they desire it. There are others who have it, but let it lie neglected, as an unfashionable book. Romances, plays, history, and various sorts of *human* compositions are in constant use: but this most excellent volume, this book that is the foundation of all our knowledge of divine things, our holiness and our comfort, is thrown aside; or when it is ever opened, it is with reluctance. What amazing ingratitude and stupidity is this! Oh, may we all be humbled for our own and others negligence, and be concerned in our respective stations to esteem, use, and improve the scripture ourselves, and do all we can to excite others to do the same; that we may see peace and righteousness again flourish, ignorance and superstition banished, and a knowledge of the gospel spreading throughout the land.—*So, Lord, let it be. Amen, and Amen.*

CASE XXI.

How may a Christian attain to perform the duty of serious meditation in a right manner?

[This question is grounded upon the following letter:]

“ SIR,

“ I AM by profession a follower of the blessed Redeemer, and hope I can appeal to the Searcher of all hearts, that it is my desire to walk in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Holy, serious meditation is, I am persuaded, a duty which every Christian ought to exercise himself in. It is a duty in which I once took great pleasure and delight: not

a day was suffered to pass in the neglect of it for a considerable time. But alas, to my shame may I speak it, an alluring world, a tempting devil, and a still viler traitor within, conspired against the welfare of my precious and immortal soul. I began to perform it in a slight, indifferent manner, and at last was prevailed upon to neglect it. Now I feel the awful effects thereof, in a dark understanding, a hard heart, and cold affections. I endeavour to set about the duty; but, oh! the spirit is withdrawn, I have lost my God; and I, whither shall I go? My thoughts are immediately gone after some trifling vanity: I endeavour to rally them, but they are soon gone again: I command them in the name of the Lord to attend, for I have a great work to do; but all is of no avail.

“I should be greatly obliged to you, Sir, if you would take my case under your notice, and give me some directions concerning the right performance of this so important a duty.”

I SHALL aim at an answer to the various particulars contained in this serious case, by laying down the following propositions:

1. *There is a great difference between speculative study and spiritual meditation.* This observation is of the greatest importance to direct us what we are to aim at when we are striving to perform this duty. Our friend, in the letter, seems to have a very clear notion of the nature of this duty, and the difference between it and mere study, from his own experience. But yet it is needful to say a few words to make this distinction clear; for though there be, in appearance, a near affinity between study and meditation, yet in reality they are as different from one another, as the sun shining in the heavens, and a sign of the sun painted. It is to be feared, that many persons are apt to imagine, that meditation is nothing else but thinking over, looking and inquiring into the doctrines and duties of the word of God. But it is plain, a person may employ himself much in this way, and yet be a stranger to true meditation. The difference lies here: study is the looking into divine things in order to understand them; but meditation is the ruminating upon them in order to apply them to your cases and consciences, and to raise our affections towards spiritual things. Study is, as I may say, the thoughts of the head, while meditation consists in, the thoughts of the heart. By study concerning God, for instance, a person inquires into the evidences for his existence, and for a notional acquaintance with his perfections and glories; but by meditation, he con-

templates those glories in order to affect his own heart with them, and to see his own concern in relation to them. The same difference may be observed between these two, with regard to any of the doctrines or duties of law or gospel. If therefore you would attain to perform this duty in a proper manner, it is highly necessary you should know what it is when you set about it, and should keep up this important distinction, lest you should cheat yourselves with bare speculative study, in the room of holy meditation.

2. *That the chief part of the experience of religion is included and contained in a right performance of this great duty.* It is in holy meditation that we feel all the experiences of the spiritual life, and exercise all the graces of the Spirit. What is the exercise of faith, but realizing thoughts upon divine and spiritual truths? What is holy desire, but a realizing view of the desirableness of God in covenant, so as to draw forth our longings after him? What is the exercise of the grace of hope, but serious meditation upon the promises and blessings promised, with suitable affection? Where consists the exercise of the grace of love, but in endearing thoughts and views of God in Christ? And what is the grace of humility, but the having low and abasing thoughts of ourselves? So that I may venture to affirm, that true grace is no further exercised by us, than as our thoughts are employed by holy meditation, in viewing and realizing spiritual things in a spiritual, heart-affecting manner. And this duty of meditation is of such a nature, that it is included in all other spiritual duties, so far as they have any thing of the exercise of grace in them. For instance: in *prayer* we have no exercise of grace, but so far as our souls take notice of our *own* wants, and of Christ's grace and fulness. In *reading* we have no exercise of grace, any farther than as we understand, realize, and apply to *ourselves* what we read. The same may be said concerning *singing* the divine praises, *hearing* the divine word, *confessing* our sins, and the like. So far then as there is any thing of the power of religion in our souls, so far the thoughts of our very hearts are engaged in, and employed about, the spiritual things we are conversant with. And thus, when any grace is exercised, there is some spiritual meditation, let the duty engaged in be what it will. But sometimes this duty of holy meditation is performed *alone*, as a separate duty; namely, when the soul is enabled to look with a spiritual eye, and in an affectionate, realizing manner, upon the things which are not seen and are eternal; when we set ourselves designedly to think on spiritual

subjects, have thoughts flowing in upon us, and have the doctrines, promises, or precepts of the word brought to our minds, and we receive them to ourselves, and apply them to our own cases. But, whether meditation be performed by itself, or in any other duty, remember, that if it be rightly performed, it always includes in it the exercise of grace, and the exercise of grace always includes meditation. From what has been said concerning this duty, it immediately follows, that none but the lively Christian can daily perform it in a right manner; and this seems to have been the happy case of the person who wrote this letter.

3. *There is a necessity for the spiritual operations of the Spirit of God, in order to a right spiritual performance of this duty.* Let us contemplate, as well as we can, upon what we read, hear, or know; yet unless we are favoured with the presence and influences of the divine Spirit, we shall find ourselves incapable of true meditation. Without him all our contemplations will be dry study, speculative thought, and laborious attempt, without success. But if the divine Spirit *takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to our souls*, then we can see them, then we can realize them, then we can feel them, and apply them to ourselves, and can think upon them with spiritual affection. As a proof of all this, I may appeal to the experience of all God's people; and may say, as Job does in another case, *If it be not so now, who will make me a liar, or make my speech nothing worth?*

4. *That the holy Spirit is a gracious, just, and sovereign agent.* We must acknowledge that he is *Sovereign*; for he, like the wind, blows where he listeth, John iii. 8. But let us not forget, that he is likewise a *wise* and *just* agent. He is, I say, a *just* agent; for when he is quenched or grieved, he resents the indignity, and justly withdraws. If therefore we grow negligent in any duty, or give way to any sin, we have reason to expect that he will withdraw from us; and when he is gone, there is an end, as I may say, for the present, to all the right performance of holy meditation. Farther, it is plain that the Spirit acts as a *wise* agent; he knows best when to favour us with his influences, or when to suspend them.

5. *Though we have not the influences of the Spirit at our command, yet there are many things that may be done by us, which may drive him away, and many means may be made use of to obtain his gracious return.* As to the former of these, I need not tell you how to drive him away. This is what I hope you dread and detest as the sorest evil. But

when he is withdrawn, the great question is, What means must be made use of for his return, that thereby our souls may be fitted for the spiritual exercise of holy meditation? This is what I apprehend our friend desires particularly to know; he wants direction for the right performance of the duty, now he finds he has lost his capacity for it. But I hope he does not imagine that any directions can answer his end without the Spirit's return. So that the first and chief concern is not, *How I may set about this work so as to attain the delightful performance of it?* but, *What method must I take to have the former influences and assistance of the Spirit restored to me?* For then, and not till then, will this duty be rightly performed. Give me leave here to lay before you a few plain directions as follow:

1. Is the Spirit withdrawn? Endeavour to maintain a sensibility of his absence. For it is a good sign that he is not totally withdrawn, while there is left in our souls a distressing, humbling sense of his absence. But if we grow careless and indifferent about his presence and influence, and now think to recover ourselves by virtue of the use of means in our power, we have missed the way, and can never attain to what we want, until our souls are led out after his gracious influences.

2. Inquire into the particular cause or occasion of the Spirit's withdrawment; and when you have found out the sin or sins which have occasioned it, then go and humbly confess them before God, loathe yourselves for them, and bring them unto the cross of Christ to be pardoned and crucified.

3. Never omit spending some time in secret, daily to converse with God, with his word, and with your own souls. Keep steady to closet religion, and endeavour to make the best of it. By no means neglect the duty itself, under a pretence that you cannot perform it aright without the Spirit. It is indeed very unpleasant and very discouraging, when we find, from day to day, that the wheels of devotion drive on heavily. But however unpleasant it be, yet you ought still to keep to it, in order to maintain a sense of, and an humble frame of spirit under, divine withdrawments. But if you should be prevailed upon to neglect these regular exercises, you can have no reason to expect, that the life of religion should be maintained, or the comforts and pleasures of it, restored to your souls.

4. Take advantage from what you feel in yourselves, to promote the work of meditation. Are you in a dark, declining, and deserted frame? It is true, you cannot at present

meditate as you would upon the glories of God in Christ with sweetness and delight; and all your endeavours to realize and impress these glorious subjects upon your mind will be found abortive, while you remain in this declining frame. But remember, that in this dark season you are called upon to another sort of meditation; namely, to meditate upon the sinfulness of sin, the deceitfulness of your own hearts, the corruption of your natures, and the sad effects produced by the working of corruptions in you. And, if you can contemplate seriously upon these awful, humbling subjects, this may be a happy means of rendering Christ and his grace, the more precious and desirable to your souls. Though in your present frame you cannot find in your hearts to dwell upon glorious and delightful subjects; yet you may find matter enough in your present condition to fill your thoughts with subjects of a self-abasing and penitential nature. And when you are employed in this sort of meditation, turn it into confession and humble supplication.

5. And lastly, Do not think that the duty of holy meditation must be confined to itself, but bring in other spiritual duties to its assistance. It is not very often we can perform this duty in a right manner separated from other duties. It is indeed a happy thing, if a person can regularly and daily form his mind to it, and find his frame fitted for it, whenever he sets about it designedly. But I believe that, generally speaking, this is a privilege that is not very common. For when we apply our minds to it professedly, and attempt to pursue a spiritual subject in a way of contemplation, the vanity of the mind either prevents us from entering upon any regular chain of thought, or soon breaks in upon it; and when we are thus disappointed, the more we strive against the stream, the more embarrassed and perplexed we shall be. It would be proper therefore to turn this attempt for meditation into mental prayer, or else take the word of God, or some spiritual author in hand, with a view to direct our thoughts, and apply what is read to our own case and circumstance. And if we can have our thoughts seriously employed, either in repeating any portion of scripture from our memories, or in reading it, or in lifting up our hearts to God in ejaculatory prayer; this is as real meditation as if it were performed in a separate duty. Upon the whole, if you are inclined to attend to such rules as these, you may hope that, *ere you are aware, your souls will make you as the chariots of a willing people*, Cant. vi. 12.

I shall conclude the whole with a few remarks upon this experimental case for the benefit of all.

1. *How gradually does sin make its entry into our souls!* We perhaps at first only begin to perform a duty in a slight manner; then we proceed to an occasional neglect of it; then to an almost total neglect, whereby the door is set open for sin and Satan to enter, and our hearts grow more and more hard, our thoughts more vain, and our souls weak to withstand any temptation, or engage in any duty.

2. *How sad are the consequences of grieving the Spirit!* It must be acknowledged, that he is very often grieved by us; but, blessed be his name, he does not always take the advantage against us; does not always resent the affronts we cast upon his gracious or comforting influences, by undervaluing or overvaluing them. If he did, the people of God would be perpetually in a deserted uncomfortable condition. But when he is once provoked to such a degree as actually to withdraw, O what sad effects follow! Now the graces of the Spirit seem to lie dead, now nothing but sin and corruption seem to reign, now we are exposed to fall a ready prey to our spiritual enemies, and we may be obliged to pray and wait a long time, before there be any comfortable return. Let us therefore be very cautious and watchful, lest we dishonour and offend him; for when we begin to fall, we know not how low we may fall, or how dismal our case may be, before he returns, and we are revived.

3. *How ungovernable are our thoughts and affections!* It is evident to a demonstration, that we have them not at our command. They are like an army of undisciplined and disaffected soldiers. The will is, as it were, the general of the army: he commands them to act, but they stir not; he sees them running away, and commands them to rally, but to no purpose. *To will is present with us, but to perform that which is good we find not.* See how necessary it is that we should be under a superior influence to that of our own hearts.

4. *How ignorant are they of the nature of true religion, who think to be pious, holy, and spiritual, at pleasure!* They who think so, betray their weakness, ignorance, and unbelief. For, if the spiritual Christian, a person that has tasted of divine grace, finds his corruptions so untameable, his affections so irregular, and his thoughts so ungovernable; how can it be, that unbelievers should have any strength so much as to think a truly good thought?

Lastly, *What a plain rule may we collect from this subject*

to judge of the progress, or declension, of spiritual grace in our souls! We may easily judge how things go with us, only by observing how strong or how weak, how frequent or how seldom, the meditations of our hearts are upon spiritual subjects. The more advanced a Christian is in the spiritual life, the more his heart can dwell upon divine subjects with pleasure and self-application, and the more natural it is to him really to meditate in the midst of the duties both of life and religion. But if we from day to day find our thoughts vain, our meditations barren, our hearts dry and unsuited to devout contemplation; it is a sign that religion is at a low ebb with us. Be therefore frequently asking yourselves such questions as these: Whether the very thoughts of your hearts are employed upon divine subjects? Whether you can truly meditate when you are *reading*, can meditate when you are *hearing*, can meditate when you are *praying*? And according to the answer your consciences give to these questions, so you may determine concerning the growth or declension of true religion in your souls. Happy are they, whose thoughts and hearts are daily taken up with spiritual things; and how much happier still are they, who are advanced to glory, where they are employed without intermission, and without end, in nothing else but holy contemplation, upon heavenly things, in heavenly places!

CASE XXII.

When may a Christian be said to pursue the affairs of the present life, so as to prevent his advances in grace, dishonour God, and injure his soul?

AS this question appears to be of so critical and important a nature, and will lead me to touch upon a darling sin, a sin too common amongst us, *viz. love of the world*; so, to be properly upon my guard, and to clear the way for a direct answer, I would first premise these two things:

1. *That all persons ought to be diligent in that calling, in which God in his providence has placed them.* Diligence in the shop is highly commendable. For want of this, persons

have often gone backward in the world, have thereby lost all opportunities of being useful, and have brought themselves into such circumstances, as greatly reflect upon the amiable character they bear as Christians. Poverty and distress are the consequences of slothfulness. Prov. xxiv. 30—34. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction: yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.* It was a command, which the Apostle under the direction of the Spirit gave, that *if any man would not work, neither should he eat*, 2 Thess. iii. 10. Industry is not only consistent with, but, highly becoming the Christian. It is of peculiar service to keep persons from temptations, both temporal and spiritual. A slothful life is a *dangerous* life. Satan has greater opportunities of laying his schemes with advantage. Whilst our hands are employed, our head is amused, and the enemy cannot so easily distress us. I hope none will take occasion, from any thing I may say in my solution of this question, to intimate that I discourage diligence. I would rather *press it*. The children of God, though interested in his peculiar favour, and heirs of glory, yet are not exempted from labour, even with regard to the present world. If they will have bread and other of the comforts of life, they must get them by the *sweat of their brows*.—Yet,

2. *The enjoyments of this world through the depravity of our hearts, are greatly insnaring, and often prove greatly injurious to the Christian.*—They are blessings in themselves, and call for thankfulness; but through the corruption of our nature, become temptations to us, often take away our affections from God, give us a coolness to spiritual duties, and endanger at least the eternal destruction of our souls. This is the reason, why our Lord in such strong terms represents the great difficulty of a rich man's salvation, Matt. xix. 24. *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* And this is the reason that the Apostle tells Timothy to *charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches*, 1 Tim. vi. 17. No wonder then, that Agur made such a *wise* choice, and begged that God would give him *neither poverty nor riches, but would feed him with food convenient for him*, Prov. xxx. 8. I mention this remark, to

show how much persons ought to be upon their guard in their pursuits of this world. The first observation shows the necessity of diligence, this tends to keep diligence from degenerating into an immoderate thirst after outward enjoyments.—I now then come to the question itself: When may a Christian be said to pursue the affairs of the present life, so as to prevent his advances in grace, dishonour God, and injure his soul? It is a difficult matter to steer between two extremes. We are either ready to be too negligent on the one hand, or too anxious and eager on the other. The Christian may often increase in worldly wealth, but God sends *leanness into his soul*. When we act unsuitably to our character, we grieve the Holy Spirit, and he in a measure departs from us, and leaves us to ourselves.—But, the Christian may be said to pursue the world, so as to dishonour God, prevent his growth in grace, and injure his soul,

1. *When it breaks in upon his opportunities of attending to spiritual duties.* It is not enough that we spend one day in seven in attending to the concerns of our souls. The Christian must not let the *week* slip away, even if his worldly engagements are never so great, without conversing with God and his own heart; if he does, it is a sad sign of his being in *languishing circumstances*. Spiritual meditation, self-examination, prayer, religious conversation, and reading the scriptures, are all duties of great importance; duties in the performance of which the Christian life is maintained, corruptions are subdued, graces are strengthened, and he is enabled to make some progress in his way to Zion. I say not how often a person must pray, read, hear, &c. that he may grow in grace. But when we find our worldly engagements breaking in upon our spiritual duties, and gradually curtailing our opportunities of attending to them, we should take the alarm. We have many enemies to encounter with in our Christian warfare. We have but little strength. We had need be much upon our guard, be much in prayer, and in the use of those means which are necessary to our spiritual prosperity. When the world therefore *encroaches* upon our time, so as to leave but little for these duties, we have reason to be afraid of a decline. Many have begun well, have set out with attending to the duties of the family and the closet; but the world, increasing upon them, has taken up their time; they have left off all family-prayer, and are, I fear, too little in the duties of retirement, and plead for an excuse, *They have no time*. They content themselves herein by a persuasion that the work was

begun some time since, and therefore they are safe, though they cannot so well attend to all the duties they once did. Whether these persons are Christians or not, I dare not determine; but I apprehend we may without hesitation conclude, that they are not *growing* Christians. They bring no honour to religion. They who give up such opportunities as these for the world, reflect thereby upon the concerns of the soul, as of a trifling nature, and far inferior to outward enjoyments: and I need not say how much this grieves the Spirit, and brings a consumption upon the new man. But if, whilst you are pursuing the world, you will reserve time for family and closet religion, for looking into your hearts, and attending the means of spiritual improvement, you may be growing as to both worlds.—

II. *The Christian may be said to pursue the things of the world, to the dishonour of God and injury of his soul, when he finds thereby a growing coldness and indifference to spiritual duties, and his thoughts are much taken off from God.* It is an unspeakable happiness, when, amidst the engagements of this life, we find a readiness to duty, and a delight in it; when we can rejoice that the sabbath is just at hand, and find that the enjoyments of the world do not give us an indifference to the great duties of it; when we find a holy warmth upon our spirits, a readiness to spiritual conversation, serious meditation, and a pleasure in closet duties. It is happy, when the Christian is enabled to keep the world at a proper distance, to look upon it as it is,—emptiness and vanity,—and cheerfully endeavour to abstract his thoughts from it, and attend, when God gives him an opportunity, to those things that relate to his immortal part. It is happy, when, like the good man whom David describes, he often employs his thoughts in sweet and spiritual meditation; when he labours to have his soul above, whilst his hands are employed, or to be habitually in a spiritual frame, to rise up to God often, in holy thoughts, desires, and affections. This is the person who makes advances in the divine life, even whilst he is busily engaged in his secular concerns, and pursuing them with all becoming diligence. But, if we find the world chilling our hearts, producing a barrenness in our frames, and a coldness to duty: if we can let slip opportunities of attending to our souls, making an excuse to God and our consciences, that we are busy, (though it really flows from that indifference the world has given us to spiritual exercises:) If we find a growing fondness for present things, and as that fondness increases, our relish for the spiritual parts

of religion lessens; if we can pursue the world with a particular gust, eagerness, and delight, but when we come to enter upon duties, we find a sad deadness and reluctance to them; if we find a growing indifference to spiritual conversation, but a pleasure in that which is worldly and trifling, we may conclude that we are pursuing the world, so as to dishonour God, and that, whilst our outward circumstances may be flourishing, our souls are in a lean and starving condition. Always suspect danger, when you find your warmth in, and relish for, spiritual duties, upon the decline; when your heart is willing to make frequent excuses for the omission of them, conclude that you have been overacting your part, and too eagerly pursuing present enjoyments.

III. *The Christian goes beyond his duty in the pursuit of this world when his inclination of improving the mercies God has given him, is in some measure taken away, and he grows into a worldly, covetous temper.* The world is not given us for ourselves only, but to improve, to lay out for the glory of God, and the good of others. Christ has left his poor with us as a legacy: we are to take care of them, to nourish and support them. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and supply the necessitous. We are to support the gospel, and in a variety of instances, use what we have, to promote the interest of our Redeemer. If then you are seeking after the world, and are diligent in your respective callings, that not only you and your families may have a comfortable subsistence, but that you may have opportunities of doing good to others, by supplying the indigent, and showing regard for the gospel; if you are concerned to set apart a portion of what God is giving you, for his cause, and to improve as his providence calls, and you find this temper of mind increases with your wealth, then you have reason to conclude that your enjoyments come with a blessing: you walk in a great measure suitably to your character, and may be making improvements in the divine life. But if, as the world increases, you lose your desire of usefulness; if you find your concern for promoting the glory of God and the good of others is lessened; if what little you give, you give grudgingly; if you find any increasing fondness for the world, and a growing desire after riches; if you are willing to grasp at all you can, and cloak your covetousness under the names of prudence and frugality; if, upon the whole, you become more selfish, and your views and desires are more contracted, you have reason to conclude, that you are pursuing the world with too much eagerness, that you

have suffered some loss as to your souls, walk unsuitably to your character, and bring but little honour to God. To put a brand upon covetousness, and to show its dangerous and destructive tendency, it is called idolatry, Col. iii. 5. The nearer we approach to it therefore, the farther we go from God.

IV. *The Christian dishonours God, and hurts his own soul, when his pursuing the world produces a proud carnal frame, or too great anxiety and distrust.* This has been too often the case. When Christians have succeeded as to this world, they have grown proud. Paul tells Timothy (as we observed before) to charge rich men that they should not be high-minded, 1 Tim. v. 17. And Agur was afraid lest riches should make him deny God, Prov. xxx. 8. *When Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked,* Deut. xxxii. 15. Christians, through a flow of prosperity, have too much forgotten God, become carnal and trifling in their frames and conversation, have been too much carried away with the thoughts of their enjoyments, aimed at a superiority over others, looking upon them with an air of haughtiness, or treating them as if they were not made of the same materials; as if they were not children of the same family, interested in the same God, and equally precious to the same Redeemer. Carefully avoid such a frame as this. It provokes God to withdraw his Spirit in a measure, the consequence of which is a sad decline in the power of religion. *He that trusteth in his riches shall fall,* Prov. xi. 28. Always be afraid that you are going backward, when your enjoyments lift you up, and bring you into a careless spirit.—Again, If your pursuits of the world are accompanied with anxiety, suspect some danger. Some persons are so eager after the world, or put such a value upon it, that they are ever fretful and uneasy, if they meet with the least disappointment. They pursue present things with the utmost solicitude, are afraid lest their schemes should not be properly executed, are ever doubting of success, and discontented if every circumstance does not appear suitable to their inclinations, or if others prosper more than they. Now what does all this signify, but a too great dependence upon the world, valuing it too highly, as if all our happiness consisted in the enjoyment of it? And what a reflection is this upon God, his providence and ways? What a grieving the Spirit? What a sinking the concerns of the soul? How unsuitable to the Christian character, and to all those who have heaven in prospect?—Thus I have endeavoured to answer the question in a

few particulars, and shall now close with some suitable reflections.

1. *How awful is their state, who have this world as their portion! It is absolutely incapable of giving complete happiness. All its enjoyments are empty and unsatisfying, and are by no means suitable to the desires of a soul.* How many have been miserable in the midst of all their affluence! A circumstance in providence robs them of all their peace, and, like Haman, they cannot be happy whilst there is a Mordecai sitting at the gate—All the world will leave them at death. The term of life is as long as they can possibly hold their enjoyments: then, however unwilling, they must take their everlasting farewell, and oftentimes when they have the highest relish of them, and delight in them, they must leave all behind, and make an awful exchange of worlds. *Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness, Ps. lii. 7.* He is not happy in life; he is far from being so at death. He leaves all, and lies down in everlasting sorrow; all that he enjoyed not being able to secure him from the terrors of the second death, or give him the least degree of ease; but *in hell he lifts up his eyes, being in great torments, Luke xvi. 23.* Lord, deliver us from such a condition.

2. *How much should each be concerned to examine himself with regard to his pursuits of this world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, 1 John ii. 15. The covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, 1 Cor. vi. 10.* This should put us upon inquiry, whether we fall under this character or not—We should inquire, whether we do not dishonour God, and injure our souls, by a too diligent pursuit of inferior comforts?—Does the world take up all my time? Can I easily omit duties, the duties of the family, or of the closet? Do I find a growing coldness to spiritual duties? What is my end in pursuing the world, to gratify an unbounded ambition of honour, wealth, or pleasure; or is it to improve every mercy, and employ every talent for the glory of God? With what frame do I pursue the world? What impression, what influence has it upon me?—God knows how it is with you; I must leave it to your consciences to answer.

3. *What matter of lamentation is it, that there are so many professing Christianity, who are of so worldly a temper! Does it not call for a tear, when we see so much of a covetous, proud, carnal, trifling spirit amongst those who call themselves*

Christians? Alas, alas! how much time in the world, how little with God! What eagerness in worldly, but what coldness in spiritual pursuits! How cheerfully are opportunities embraced for the world, but how are they omitted for God! How does the world lift us up! What readiness to lay out any thing upon self, how backward to use it for the good of others? What self-love amongst Christians! Is it not so? Canst thou stand the test, Christian? Is not thy heart too much divided? Art thou not too greedy of earthly gain? Dost thou not trust too much in thy riches? Where is thy love to God, thy zeal for his glory? Oh be ashamed, ye professors of religion, be ashamed for your earthliness, your coldness, your carnality, and unprofitableness.

Let us all then be upon our guard, and pursue the world, so as that we may honour God, and grow in grace. Consider, amidst your pursuits of present things, that they are all transitory and uncertain, Luke xii. 16—21.—Consider, and walk under the view of that day, when you must give an account of your improvement of time, with all your enjoyments.—Consider the obligations Christ has laid you under to him, and what a short time you have to do any thing for him or his people.—Consider how much more excellent spiritual enjoyments are than temporal.—And may the Lord enable us all to keep a watch over our hearts, and to use this world so as not to abuse it, knowing that the fashion of all things is passing away.

CASE XXIII.

How may a Professor, who fears lest his experiences are counterfeit and not genuine graces, come to such a satisfaction concerning his state, as shall encourage his continued reception of the Lord's supper?

THIS question, which so much regards all members of gospel churches, is taken into consideration, upon account of the following letter:—

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I AM a young person, who have had a religious education, and have had hopes that it was not entirely in vain; though I desire to be ashamed, that I have improved it no better. I should be very much obliged to you, if you would form a question, and answer it, as soon as possible, from the following broken account of myself. I was under convictions, when I was very young; but they were too often stifled by me. But since that I have returned, and did believe God had begun a good work on my soul. I then thought it my duty to give myself up to the Lord in a public manner, was received into a church of Christ, have often found pleasure in attending upon those ordinances, and in particular have found comfort at the Lord's table. Though it has not been always the same with me when there, yet I have hoped, that when the ordinance was not so comfortable, it was an humbling one. I am often in darkness about my state, and am ready to fear lest I should have deceived myself; but desire still to seek God, and would esteem an interest in Christ above all the perishing riches of this vain world, nay, above ten thousand worlds. But, Sir, I know not what to think of myself after all. If there is a false faith, a false love, a false hope, a false humility, and the like, perhaps mine may be no better. Is it my duty to go to the table of the Lord, if I have no real love to him, and no true faith in him? Is not this an ordinance of love? And when we attend upon it, is not this a time to put faith in Christ in exercise? But if my faith and love are false, what must I do? Am I not deceiving myself and others, and mocking God? Surely none ought to go to this ordinance, who have not a change wrought in them; and if there be a false pleasure in such an ordinance, as well as a false faith, how can I know that mine is not so? I fear I lean too much to outward duties. I should esteem it a favour, if you would, Sir, show me what is true faith, true love, &c. and what is the difference between them and false experiences, that I may know in some measure how it is with me. If I belong to Christ, I desire to honour him both living and dying.”

THIS letter plainly expresses the doubtful state of many a serious Christian, that has had the enjoyment of gospel ordinances for a considerable time, and has been admitted into the peculiar privileges of church-fellowship. For I doubt not but that there is many a person whose heart reasons just after this

manner: "I hope I have received the grace of God in truth, and do now make a public profession of it: but oh! when I hear that even professors may deceive themselves with false instead of true hopes, with a false instead of a true love, I am afraid of myself, lest all my experiences should have been of this kind. And since there is so much perplexity in my case, so much deceitfulness in my heart, and so much confusion in my mind concerning myself, how shall I come to know whether it is my duty to go on receiving the Lord's supper, as usual? I am afraid all is not right between God and my soul: and if, after all, it should appear that my faith is a false faith, my hope a false hope, my humility a false humility, and the like, it is plain I have no right to partake of the Lord's supper. Though indeed I have a visible right to the ordinance by reason of my profession and church-membership, yet I am afraid I have no real spiritual right to it. Had I not then better suspend an attendance upon the Lord at his table, lest I should go on deceiving myself and others, until I can gain a clearer satisfaction concerning my state? And if I should thus withhold for a time, how shall I arrive at this desired satisfaction, or how shall I attain to a well-grounded persuasion, that my experiences are true and genuine graces, not spurious and counterfeit."

In this way of reasoning many a conscientious professor and serious Christian often perplexes himself about his present duty; while the mere nominal Christian, the hypocritical professor, has generally no doubts upon this head, but goes on in the outward participation of gospel privileges, to the deceiving of others, and the hardening his own heart more and more. May the Lord enable me to speak to this important point with faithfulness and clearness! And may the blessed Spirit set it home upon each of our hearts for our humiliation and consolation.

In order therefore to answer this question, I must desire all, who make a visible profession, to look closely into these four things: 1. Look into your conduct and practice. 2. Into the nature and ground of your doubts and jealousies. 3. Into the frame and temper of your mind with respect to the Lord's supper. And, 4. Into the tendency of those experiences you feel in yourselves.

1. Look attentively *into your conduct and practice*. For we must take that as a general rule in all cases, which the Apostle lays down, 1 John i. 6, 7. *If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but*

if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. Be careful therefore to put those two suppositions faithfully to yourselves. If you *walk in darkness*, that is, if you go on knowingly and willingly in the path of sin, or in the omission of known incumbent duty, you may take it for granted, that all your pretences are vain, that your profession is hypocrisy; and though you are church members, and so have a *visible* right to all the ordinances of the church, yet you are strangers to Christ, his truth and Spirit. Your allowed practice of any known sin, whether secret or open, gives your profession the lie; or, as the Apostle strongly expresses it, *you lie, and do not the truth.* But if, on the contrary, it is your real desire to walk in all the *statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless*; if you desire to be found in the way of your duty, to watch, strive, and pray against sin; if you are sincerely desirous to honour and serve the Lord from a principle of love to him, and from a sense of his love to you; then you have real spiritual fellowship with one another, and with the church of God; and will happily find, that *the blood of Jesus Christ*, represented in the Sacrament, *cleanses you more and more from all sin.* I hope this is the case with the young person who wrote this letter; for there are many things in it, that seem to prove the sincerity of his profession; such as these: he desires to seek God; esteems an interest in Christ above all the perishing riches of this vain world, nay, above ten thousand worlds; is afraid that he leans too much to his own outward duties, and has a desire to honour Christ both living and dying. Surely this is not the language of an unregenerate heart. Thus-then let all professors inquire into their conduct and practice.

2. Inquire into the nature and ground of these doubts and jealousies. You say you are often in darkness about your state, and are ready to fear that you have been all along deceiving yourself; and understanding that there are such things as false experiences, false faith, false hope, false humility, false delight, and the like, your suspicions are strengthened, and your heart is discouraged. Now, I say, ask yourselves what is the reason of these doubts and suspicions? I know that Satan and an unbelieving heart, will unite to cast a damp upon the mind, and inject a surmise with special strength and weight. But perhaps it is only a surmise that is injected, which does not offer any particular reason for its support. Now if these injections and surmises offer nothing to ground

themselves upon, they are not to be attended to, but to be resisted and rejected. You are in this case to take the shield of faith, in order to quench these fiery darts of the wicked one. Whensoever such jealousies seize your mind, ask that question seriously, which the Psalmist put to himself, Ps. xlii. 5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?* Do not hearken to the suggestion, unless it gives some sufficient reason for its support.

But if your mind offers any reason for these doubts and fears, then look attentively to them. Perhaps you will say, "Oh, I see much reason to doubt; for I feel much corruption in my heart, much deadness and carnal security, much vanity and selfishness, and every abomination in me, while I experience but little of love to God, or faith in his Son." And are such things as these, the true reasons of your fears? You have then great ground to hope, that all is well with you. For this is an intimation that the Lord has enlightened you into the knowledge of yourself; has given you a view of the plague of your own heart, and does not suffer you to be contented under the prevalency of any corruption. This sort of doubt is so far from rendering your experiences the more suspicious, that it rather proves all you feel, that is like faith, hope, and love, to be true and genuine; for this jealousy proceeds upon a spiritual sight and conviction of your own unworthiness, guilt, and corruption.

Again, Look into the tendency of these suspicions. Which way do they work? Do they not tend to make you more humble and watchful; and while you thus walk in the dark, do you not therefore walk the more slowly and cautiously? Do they not make you more desirous after true grace and greater enlargement in duty? Do they not make you long more for holiness? If they work this way, you have great reason to conclude, from the very nature of your suspicions, that your hearts are right with God, and principled with his saving grace.

3. Inquire into the *frame and temper of your Spirit with regard to the Lord's supper*. Why do you desire a continued enjoyment of this privilege? What is it makes you want to have free access to this ordinance? Is it to subserve some temporal interest? Is it to make a justifying righteousness of this privilege? Or is it that you may be the better esteemed among Christians or professors? If it be, then you have sad reason to fear, that you have no real right to the ordinance.

But do you desire the continued enjoyment of this privilege,

to testify your love to Christ, to have your sins subdued, to have your graces strengthened, your affections for Christ inflamed, and to have some sweet enjoyment of him, along with the saints of God? In a word, are your views and desires conformable to the design of Christ, in appointing this spiritual ordinance? If they are, how dark soever your frame may be, how dubious soever you may be as to your state, or how much soever you complain under the power of corruption, you may come and welcome to the Lord's table; since your designs and desires in coming are, to behold that which Christ therein exhibits, and to receive what Christ has to bestow. This ordinance was particularly designed to comfort and establish such as are worried by the temptations of Satan, and oppressed by their tyrannizing corruptions.

As therefore you have a visible right by being a church-member, and being under no church censure, you ought to account that you have a real right to it; because the Lord draws forth your desires, and directs your views to that which is the very design of this sacred institution. Come then, and welcome: continue your attendance; for you are welcomed to the table by Christ himself, as well as by his church.

Lastly, Inquire into the tendency of those experiences you feel in yourselves. In looking over the particulars of the letter which occasioned this question, I find there are five fundamental graces of the Spirit mentioned; concerning all of which, our friend desires to know how he shall be satisfied that they are true and genuine, namely, *faith, hope, love, humility, and spiritual pleasure*. It is true, there is a counterfeit to each of these in the hearts and experiences of temporary believers, and mere notionalists. But, if you would know whether yours are true or false, look into the tendency and working of them in your hearts. It would require much time and several discourses to enter deeply into the consideration of each of these graces, and to set forth the evidences and marks of their being either spurious or genuine. But I shall endeavour to run through them in as brief a manner as I can, suggesting a few thoughts that may give some satisfaction concerning the truth of each of them.

1. Look into your faith. You sometimes feel motions in your heart that have the appearance of faith in, and reliance upon, the Lord Jesus. But, as there is a false faith, you are afraid yours may be such. Consider then, and ask yourselves such questions as these: Whether your faith is only notional, or whether it be joined with a serious concern for yourselves,

about an interest in Christ and his salvation? Again, inquire whether you go to Christ for sanctification, as well as for justification; inquire likewise whether the reason of your application to Christ be an inward conviction of your own guilt, corruption, and helplessness, or whether it be only a flighty affection, without any serious insight into yourselves? Now you may be sure, that if your souls act towards Christ from a serious concern for holiness as well as for happiness, proceeding upon an inward knowledge of yourselves, and founded upon the free encouragement of the gospel, you may be sure your faith is true and genuine.

2. As to your Hope. You have at seasons some pleasing hope in your souls concerning an interest in Christ, and the possession of his salvation. You not only fly to Christ, but you have received some hope into your souls, that he will save you with an everlasting salvation. Take notice then what is the foundation and what is the tendency of this hope.

Observe what is the *foundation* of this hope. If it be grounded upon an imagination of the excellency of your duties, and the goodness of your heart, it is a hope that will make ashamed; because it betrays your ignorance of your own imperfections and corruptions. But if it be founded upon the freeness of divine grace, the riches of divine love, and the faithfulness of the divine promises, it will stand the trial, because it proceeds from *the love of God shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit*, Rom. v. 5.

Again, Look into the *tendency* of your hope. If it tends to make you careless under the power of sin, or more careless about walking with God, because you have a prospect of being happy for ever, this is all wrong; such a hope is certainly spurious and presumptuous. But if, on the contrary, it is your heart's desire to glorify God, to fly from sin, and to increase in holiness, the more your hopes grow; this is a token your hope is genuine: for he that has a gospel hope in him, *purifies himself, even as Christ is pure*, 1 John iii. 2.

3. As to your Love. You feel some outgoings of affection to Christ, to his ordinances, to his people; but you fear lest all this may be counterfeit; and so it is, if this your love is consistent with the love and liking of sin: but if your affection for Christ teaches you to cleave unto the Lord, to delight in his ordinances, to love his people upon account of their being such, and if it makes you the more willing and desirous to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ, it is surely a genuine love.

4. As to your pleasure and delight in spiritual things. You sometimes feel a delight in divine ordinances, a secret pleasure in attending upon the means of grace, because they are sweet and comfortable to your souls; but fear lest this likewise should be false. Indeed we must acknowledge, that even a hypocrite may have a pleasure in enjoying the means of grace, as we are told, *Isaiah lviii. 2.* There it is said, concerning the hypocritical Israelites, that *they sought God daily, delighted to know his ways, and even delighted in approaching to God.* But what was the reason and ground of their delight? It was because they hoped, by such services, to make atonement for their sins, and bring themselves into the divine favour by their own duties, as appears, *verse 3, Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge?* They had such a high opinion of their duties, that they thought it strange God did not smile upon and reward them for their religious services. But now ask yourselves this question, What is the reason of your delight in divine ordinances? Is it from a hope of being justified thereby, or of laying God under some obligation to you? Do you take pleasure in them merely because they are suited to your own sentiments, or because they convey a pleasure to your ears? Then indeed it may be counterfeit. But if your pleasure in approaching to God is, because you desire and hope to find him in his ordinances; because you would receive supplies from him, and enjoy communion with him, and would be brought nearer to him, and be made more like him, you may then be sure that your pleasure and delight is genuine.

Lastly, as to your Humility. You find something within you that looks like a proper humiliation before God and his people; but your fear is, lest this likewise should be spurious and counterfeit. To be satisfied as to this matter, seriously inquire into the nature of your humility; whether it be feigned or forced, or whether it arises from a real sight and conviction of your own meanness, guilt, and pollution, as before God. There is a kind of voluntary humility, which some are very fond of; striving to represent themselves before their fellow Christians as very contemptible and polluted, as very ignorant and weak, professing themselves to be such before men, when they know in their own consciences they would not choose their companions should have that opinion of them; but they do it on purpose that their friends may think them very modest and self-abased. It is evident, at first thought, that this

humility has a most hateful pride at the bottom of it; and those that are given to it, and fond of it, have great reason to suspect themselves; as they would certainly be suspected by their friends, could they see through the disguise.

But true humility is an unfeigned, unforced thing: the person that has it, is really low in his own eyes; he sees and laments before God his own guilt, weakness, and impurity; he confesses himself, in the sight of God, as the chief of sinners; and the more he sees of the grace of God in Christ, the more he admires it, is affected with it, yea, and humbled by it. None are more humble in reality than those, who can view and receive the grace of the gospel as entirely free. The truly humble person, the more he sees of the divine glory, and the more he beholds the riches of grace, the more he lays himself low at the divine footstool. He says with Job, chap. xlii. 5, 6. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* This is that broken spirit and contrite heart which God will not despise. But God does, and man too would, despise a feigned, voluntary, affected humility. Inquire, therefore, whether your being abased, is thus sincere or feigned.

Once more, look into the depth of your humility. Perhaps you are low in your own eyes, merely because of some particular defects of capacity or knowledge; or chiefly because of some enormities or irregularities in your practice. If this be all, it is not sufficiently deep. But if that which makes you self-abased, is a view of your own spiritual emptiness and poverty; a view of the corruptions of your nature, and the sins of your thoughts and affections; and you see yourselves in such a light as to be heartily willing to receive all salvation as a gift entirely free, and to be truly thankful for every degree of hope you are favoured with, as utterly undeserved and unprocured by you; then you are among the number of those, whom Christ, first of all, pronounces blessed, saying, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,* Matt. v. 3.

Thus inquire into the genuineness of your experiences, and look up to the Blessed Spirit, to enable you to pass a right judgment upon them. The whole is this: if that *faith, hope, love, delight, and humility*, you experience in yourselves, tend to wean you more and more from sin and the world, to win you over to embrace and admire the free grace of the gospel, and to make you depend upon, and delight in Christ, both for

justification and sanctification, your graces are true and genuine, not spurious and counterfeit.

But, after all that can be said upon this searching subject, I know that in many cases no clear satisfaction can be given or received in a way of self-examination. There is a necessity for the witness of God's Spirit to join with ours, to assure us that we are the children of God. There is so much darkness in our minds, deceitfulness in our hearts, and perplexity in our thoughts, that the clearest cases will sometimes be clouded, and the brightest evidences obscured.

You will say then, What must a poor soul do in such circumstances? When he cannot gain the satisfaction he wants by reason of the Spirit's withdrawal, must he abstain from the peculiar privileges of church-fellowship? Must he desist from a regular reception of the Lord's Supper, until these matters be cleared up to his satisfaction?

I shall give my answer to this in the application, which shall be, (1.) for *Encouragement*; (2.) for *Reproof*; (3.) for *Warning*.

1. For *Encouragement*. Let me here speak a free word to such poor doubting souls. Let me ask you, Are you conscious of indulging and embracing any secret or open sin? Do you harbour any sinister or worldly views in desiring to eat of the children's bread? Do you want to make a justifying righteousness of this special ordinance? I hope you can answer in the negative to these queries, by saying, that, so far as you know your own hearts, you would not, you dare not. If so, then you do not impose upon the church, or pervert the design of the ordinance in your reception of it.

Do you still say, "Oh, I fear, and have great reason to fear, that I have been a self-deceiver; for I cannot come to any clear evidence of the truth of my graces and experiences!" And do you therefore think it your duty to desist, upon this account, from attending at the Lord's table? Think again, What would be the consequence, if every doubting soul were to reason in this manner? If none but those that were free from doubts would attend, I fear that very few would be found at the sacramental feast. Our churches are thin enough already; many gracious persons keep themselves from the fellowship of a church upon the same account. And how few, very few, would honour Christ by such a profession of his name, if all were to act upon this plan? And what will you say as to the Pastor himself? Do you think him to be always free from such doubts, fears, and perplexities of soul? If you

do, you are very much mistaken. And what if he should absent himself every time his heart was dubious and perplexed? This would run church ordinances into confusion indeed. It is therefore abundantly evident, that a serious church member should not absent himself from the Lord's table, because of his doubts and fears. No, no: doubting, distressed souls should rather come, that there their doubts may be scattered, their faith strengthened, and their comforts restored. Come and welcome, so that you come with views and desires to meet with Christ, to see him, to receive from him, and to testify your regard for him, as the chief desire and only hope of your souls. You need not fear receiving any damage by coming unworthily, if you come with such views as these; but may rather hope to find Christ and his love there shed abroad in your hearts.

2. I have now a word of *reproof* to many serious Christians. I cannot but find fault with several for being always upon the complaint. You harbour your doubts and fears, you encourage them; your souls refuse to be comforted; you are always making scruples, raising objections, and seem to be resolved not to be satisfied with the plainest evidences. Such a temper as this is surely dishonourable to Christianity; it is grieving the good Spirit; and it is ungrateful to God, who has given you some tokens of his love. Because he has not given you all the grace and comfort he has to others, you will therefore continually suspect his love. But I must leave this charge to every one's own conscience; and while I heartily pity those, who are truly in darkness and distress of soul, I must say that those are much to be blamed, who are fond of recommending themselves to their fellow-Christians by making themselves appear as very dark and discouraged. Those who are this way inclined, do insensibly sink themselves lower and lower, and provoke the Spirit of God more and more to withdraw his enlightening and comforting influence. Once more,

3. A word for *warning* and conviction. Remember there are three sorts of church members: those who have their evidences clear, and graces in exercise; those who are under darkness and doubts; and those who mind none of these things, so as they can but keep up a visible profession, and maintain their credit among Christians. These last are very easy and satisfied; they have no scruples nor doubts; and think it enough, if they can but keep themselves from falling under the censure of the church, or of their fellow professors. Let me tell you, that such as these, it is to be feared, are *tares*

among the wheat. These have great reason to suspect, that all is not right with them. And though I would do and say all I could to encourage the serious, dubious soul; yet I must proclaim, that such carnal *gospellers* are in the most dangerous condition. They receive this sacrament only to keep the name alive; and, by continuing in this way, they stifle the convictions of their own consciences, harden their hearts more and more, and are in danger of falling into sin and hell from all their profession and privileges. If these lines come into the hands of any such, oh, that they may be made to strike home to their consciences; and remind them, that the case of the serious, fearful, and dubious soul, who comes with trembling and concern to the table of the Lord, is abundantly preferable to theirs, who boldly claim a privilege with no higher view than to support the name they bear in the eyes of others. May the Lord convince and deter such, while he comforts and encourages the feeble-minded by his word and Spirit!

CASE XXIV.

Whether a person can desire the blood of Christ to be applied to his soul, and yet be a hypocrite?

THIS question gives me an opportunity of clearing a point, which appears full of difficulties in the view of some, is treated by others as an enthusiastic fancy, but is a point of the greatest importance to souls. The application or sprinkling of the blood of Christ is absolutely necessary to our everlasting salvation, however unintelligible the phrase may appear to unenlightened minds. It is the peculiar glory of Revelation to make known this important mystery, to let us see how salvation comes to us, and to encourage us, in our application for it, in the way which is most for the glory of God, and our happiness.—Yet, notwithstanding the clear revelation of this most interesting truth, many have but confused conceptions of it, and cannot get their ideas clear and free from perplexity. To set this point therefore in as distinct a light as I can, I would do these three things:

1. *Consider what is meant by the blood of Christ.*

II. *How this blood is applied to, or sprinkled upon us.* And,

III. *For what purposes it is applied.* A consideration of these things will, I hope, free the subject from all difficulties, and furnish our friend with a sufficient answer to his question.—And may God bless what may be delivered, to enlighten our minds more and more in these great and distinguishing truths of Christianity, and bring us to a hearty acceptance of and dependence upon the great sacrifice for sin, for all the ends it was designed to answer.

I. *I am to consider what is meant by the blood of Christ.*
—We have frequent mention made of the blood of Christ in the New Testament, which by a *synecdoche*, is put for all his sufferings in life and death, all being of the greatest importance to us. His agony in the garden, as well as his other sufferings, must be considered. Much stress seems to be laid indeed upon his death, and much imputed to it, because without this he could have been no Saviour: this was the last act of his obedience; now the wrath of God, in a peculiar manner, lay heavy upon him; men and devils now united their force against, and vigorously beset him; and now he spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed over them openly. For these reasons we have a particular mention made of the death of Christ. Thus the Apostle says, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Gal. vi. 14. But he does not mention this to exclude the sufferings of his life, or even the obedience which Christ paid to the preceptive part of the law; the Apostle being sensible of the great importance of all these to his salvation; but he might particularly mention the cross of Christ for the above considerations.—Blood signifies farther, that Christ suffered in his whole human nature. The blood of the sacrifices of old was to be *sprinkled upon the altar, and to make atonement for sin*, Lev. xvii. 11. Now in the blood lay the life of the beast, and therefore the Jews were forbidden to eat blood, v. 10. The blood sprinkled was typical, and showed what was absolutely necessary in the great sacrifice that was to be offered, viz. that not only the blood of the Lamb of God should be actually shed, or that his body should be wounded, but that his soul too should be pierced and bruised. This we find was indeed the case. *He made his soul an offering for sin*, Is. liii. 10. *His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*, Matt. xxvi. 38. It was the agony of his soul chiefly, that discovered its intenseness by his bloody sweat in the garden. Oh, the anguish he must feel when drinking the bitter cup! No wonder innocent nature struggled

at the view. *God spared not his Son.* He spared neither body nor soul, but bruised them both, that so the sacrifice might be complete. Thus by the blood of Christ, we must understand all the sufferings of his human nature both in life and death, or all that was necessary to his being a proper propitiation for sin.—But, as the active and passive obedience of Christ are not to be separated, but are both necessary to our justification before God; so I would not speak of one to oppose or exclude the other, but have my eye upon both, as being of the utmost importance.—Let us now consider,

II. *How this blood is applied to, or sprinkled upon us.* It is not enough for us, that the blood of Christ was shed; unless it is applied to us, we shall never receive any saving benefit from it. It is called therefore *the blood of sprinkling*, because it is sprinkled upon us, Heb. xii. 24. The saints above are said to have *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*, Rev. vii. 14. Here is something else then to be considered; besides the offering the sacrifice, there must be an application of it, or else the great ends and purposes of it can never be answered. Now in this application of the blood of Christ there are two acts,—an act of God, and an act of ours: both these are absolutely necessary to our enjoying the blessings purchased by the blood of Christ. Particularly,

1. *God sprinkles this blood upon us.*—This is by an act of imputation, a foundation for which was laid in the substitution of Christ in our room and stead. The Lord therefore is said to *lay on him the iniquities of us all*, Isa. liii. 6. And the Apostle says, *that he his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree*, 1 Pet. ii. 24. And again, 2 Cor. v. 21. *He hath made him to be sin for us.* He suffered and died as a sinner, though he was not actually so. He bore the punishment which the sins of his people deserved; and this opens a way for God's dealing with us according to the infinite virtue and merit of the Redeemer's sacrifice, or for imputing his righteousness to us. Upon the whole, when Christ was obeying the law, and suffering its penalty, God considered Christ as the representative of his people; and therefore in his own time, in a perfect consistency with his justice, and by an act of his grace, he imputes this righteousness to us, or makes it ours, so as effectually to answer all the ends and purposes for which it was appointed. The impressing the heart and conscience with a view of this atoning blood for its relief under all disquietude, is likewise an act of God, and of great importance to fill the soul with joy and peace in believing.

2. *There is an act of ours too, necessary to the real saving application of the blood of Christ to our souls.*—This is to believe. Faith must be wrought in us, and exercised by us, or else we can have no interest in the death of Christ, nor receive any saving advantage from it. Faith is the hand which the soul stretches forth, and lays hold of Christ and his righteousness: it is that by which the sinner transfers his sins to Christ, lays his hand upon the head of the great high-priest, and makes confession of his sins, views the intent and virtue of the Redeemer's blood, pleads it with the Father, and makes it all his dependence. Thus both these acts are necessary, absolutely necessary to our interest in Christ, and all the important blessings he has purchased. By the one, God sprinkles this blood upon us; by the other, the sinner receives it. The one is of imputation, the other is of believing. The one is an act of God's grace towards us, the other is a grace implanted in us, and exercised by us, under the influences of the Spirit of God. And here we may observe, that God and the sinner have the same ends in view; the one in sprinkling, the other in receiving this blood. There must be a union in this important point, or else there can be no communion with God, no enjoyment of him. And therefore you will find in the sinner, when properly applying to the blood of Christ, a frame of mind corresponding with the purposes of God in the appointment and sprinkling of this blood. This brings me,

III. To inquire into the purposes of God in the shedding and application of the blood of Christ; and we shall find, that these very purposes the sinner has in view in looking to his blood, and so shall have a sufficient answer to this question. And here I shall not confine myself to the sufferings of Christ, but take into consideration the whole of that righteousness which God imputes, and which the sinner receives, as this will by no means be inconsistent with the question sent me.

Now the design of this blood, in its being shed for us, and sprinkled upon us, is threefold, viz. *To justify us before God. —To give peace to our conscience, and boldness at the throne of grace—and to promote our sanctification.* To answer these important purposes, God imputes the righteousness of the great Mediator to us: and these are the ends the sinner has in view in looking to it, receiving it, and depending upon it.

1. *The blood or righteousness of Christ is designed to justify us before God.* If we consider it as intending the sufferings and death of Christ, these were absolutely necessary to make

atonement for sin, by satisfying infinite justice, and opening a way for God's pardoning the guilty creature, in a consistency with the glory of every divine perfection. This was the end of Christ's sacrifice. It was a true expiatory sacrifice, and therefore typified by the sacrifices of old. In this, and no other sense, can he with the least propriety be said to be the *Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world*. This would by no means have been a suitable character for him, if he had only lived and died as an example, and to confirm the doctrines he preached. *He was wounded for our sins, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that by his stripes we might be healed*, Isa. liii. 5. *He was made a curse for us*, that he might deliver us from the curse of the law we are naturally under, Gal. iii. 13. When his blood is sprinkled upon us, our iniquities are forgiven; we may look upon the sword of divine justice as sheathed, and God as become reconciled. If we consider the phrase, *blood of Christ*, as including his obedience to the preceptive part of the law, we shall have a complete righteousness to introduce us actually into the favour of God, make us appear amiable in his sight, and give us an unquestionable title to eternal life, as well as a full atonement to procure our pardon, and to deliver us from everlasting punishment. This is the righteousness, which is the only justifying righteousness of a poor sinner. This is the righteousness which the Apostle Paul desired above all things to be found clothed with, Phil. iii. 9. This is the righteousness which is by faith; the righteousness with which infinite justice is well pleased; the righteousness which the believer carries with him out of time into eternity, and appears in before the bar of God. In fine, the design of God in imputing this righteousness, and the design of the soul in applying to it by faith, is his justification. And there is in the sinner, in receiving this righteousness, a frame of mind suitable to the end God has in view in the imputation of it. Thus, it is designed for his justifying righteousness. The soul comes humble, under a suitable sense of the insufficiency of all his own religious duties and services to answer that purpose, renouncing all he has done, acknowledging himself to be but an unprofitable servant, and pleading to be clothed with this wedding-garment, and looking to it alone for justification before God. But,

2. *Another end of the blood of Christ is to give peace to the conscience, and boldness and confidence before God.*—The Apostle exhorts us, when we draw near to God, to do it in

full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, Heb. x. 22. It is the application of the blood of Christ by faith, that alone can deliver us from a terrifying and condemning conscience, silence all its clamours, and fill it with solid peace and tranquillity. When a soul therefore is awakened and distressed with sin, he can find no rest, till he is enabled to view and apply the blood of Christ. When he considers the infinite evil there is in sin, and the many transgressions he is chargeable with; when he views the condemning sentence of the law, and the justice and holiness of God, he is filled with distressing fears, till he fixes his eye upon the sacrifice of Christ. He is afraid to come into the presence of God; he is ready to think it presumption to hope for his favour, and that he is one cast off, and must expect to be doomed to everlasting darkness, the portion which he has justly deserved. His conscience is like the restless sea, ever uneasy; it wounds, it terrifies him; he hears no sound but that of everlasting burnings; he knows not where to fly for peace; he goes to duty, thinking that will give him relief; but so many imperfections appearing, this will yield him no satisfaction. But when he is led to view the blood of Christ, the eternal appointment of the great sacrifice, its perfect acceptableness to the Father, and its infinitely atoning virtue; when the Spirit realises to, and impresses upon, his conscience, the atoning sufferings of Christ, shedding abroad the dying love of the Redeemer in his heart: when he is enabled by faith to *apply* it to his guilty soul, he finds it a cordial indeed; it opens a door of hope in all his distress, and fills him with joy and peace in believing. Thus Christ gives rest to labouring and heavy-laden souls.—Methinks I see the poor distressed creature emerging out of his difficulties, and lifting up his head with comfort, saying to conscience—Oh conscience, how hast thou wounded me with thy killing language, thy repeated and painful stings! I knew not what to do; fly from thee I could not; approach the throne of God I durst not, with any lively hope; but now I have found a messenger, one among a thousand, one who is able to answer to all thy accusations, to remove all thy heavy and awful charges, and to speak peace to my weary soul. See the blood of Christ! Hear, it speaks better things than the blood of *Abel*. Am I guilty? through this shall I have pardon. Am I unworthy? there is an infinite fulness of merit in this. Have I violated the law of God? Christ was made a curse for me. With his sacrifice in the arms of my faith, I can view a holy God, come into his pre-

sence with the boldness and confidence of a child, and expect all the blessings of salvation.—Thus it speaks peace to conscience.

3. *The blood of Christ is the great means of our sanctification.* It not only purchased grace for us, but is the great means of increasing it in us. Christ came to purify his people, and a believing view of his sacrifice tends greatly to bring about this important purpose. When the believer is enabled to apply the blood of Christ to his soul, to view its infinite virtue, the riches of grace manifested in it, and the blessings he enjoys through the application of it; oh he finds in it the most powerful dissuasives from sin, and the strongest motives to holiness; he finds it sweetly melting his hard heart, filling him with hatred of sin, with deep self-abhorrence, stirring him up to a holy diligence and watchfulness in the service of God, animating him with boldness and courage, reconciling him to every difficulty, filling him with patience and cheerfulness in every trial, endearing the Lord Jesus Christ to him, kindling the fire of divine love, and bringing him into a greater conformity to the image of Christ. There is nothing gives a greater stab to sin, nothing crucifies our lusts and corruptions more, than a view of a crucified Saviour. When we *look upon him that was pierced, we mourn*, Zech. xiv. 10. When the Apostle viewed the cross of Christ, he *found himself crucified to this world, and this world to him*. Gal. vi. 14.—Upon the whole, there is nothing destroys sin more in the soul, than to look to Christ on the cross. They therefore are always the most flourishing Christians, who converse most with Christ by faith. These then are the ends God had in view in establishing this way of salvation, in the shedding the blood of Christ, and sprinkling it upon the soul. Now, if these are the ends you have in view in desiring to have this blood applied to your souls, it is a comfortable evidence of your being Christians indeed. For instance: if, sensible of your guilt, and the insufficiency of your own righteousness to justify you before God, you are willing to receive him as your Lord, your righteousness, resting upon the infinite merit of his blood alone; if you look to this to ease your wounded conscience, give you boldness and confidence in your approaches to God, and support you under every accusation of sin and Satan; if you desire this blood to be applied to your soul to cleanse it more and more from the pollution of sin, and to purify your heart, that you may be growing in holiness, you may then conclude that you have passed from death unto life, and are far from

being a hypocrite. But if you approve only of the justification of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ, and see not a beauty in real holiness; if you would have the blood of Christ sprinkled upon you to deliver you from everlasting punishment, but not to cleanse your polluted heart; if you would be saved from hell, but yet live in sin, you have no reason to look upon yourself as a real Christian; and therefore all your expectations of pardon and salvation from Christ will meet with an awful disappointment. Christ must not be divided. If we are not willing to receive him in all his characters, it is in vain to call ourselves Christians. He is made of God to all his people wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Thus you are furnished with an answer to the above important question. I shall now close all with a word or two of improvement. And,

1. *Hence we see how lovely the Lord Jesus Christ should appear to us all.*—Did he come and obey the law? Did he come and submit to the death of the cross? Did he bear the wrath of God, and give his life as a ransom; and all this for us, to make atonement for our sins, and secure to us all the blessings of salvation? How amazing the love! How hard the heart that feels no affection for this Jesus! How ungrateful the creature who can despise the Redeemer! His love should recommend him to all. It will recommend him to all the saints. They love him here, and they long often for a better world, where they will love him with a supreme and undivided affection.

2. *If any would know whether their hopes of eternal life are rightly founded, we see what inquiries they must make.*—Not only whether they believe the gospel, with all its important truths, but whether they see their need of the blood of Christ; consequently, whether they see themselves guilty, naked, polluted, and miserable; whether they are willing to fly to the Lord Jesus Christ, and are enabled to depend upon him for all salvation; whether they want to be sprinkled with his blood, not only for their justification, but sanctification too. These are inquiries of the most important nature, and should be attended to by all who would know the state of their souls.

3. *Hence we see where relief must be found for a distressed soul.* The righteousness, the death, the suretyship of Christ, are what lay a foundation of comfort to awakened sinners. Here is room for the chief of sinners to hope for pardon, for the greatest backsliders to accept mercy. Here is a sovereign balm, which will heal every wounded spirit. When thou art discouraged on account of thy sins, their heinousness, their

number, thy unworthiness, and art ready to conclude that there is no hope for thee, look upon the blood of Christ; consider for what ends it was shed; view its infinite virtue; hear what the glorious Mediator said just before he gave up the ghost, *It is finished*; and view the happy thousands above, all the living evidences of the saving efficacy of Christ's death and sufferings. Art thou a great sinner? the blood of Christ proclaims pardon. Hast thou a hard heart? the blood of Christ, applied by faith, will quickly melt it. Art thou full of terrors of soul? this blood is sufficient to remove all, allay the furious storm, and cause a perfect calm, a peaceful serenity. Art thou sadly entangled with thy corruptions? this same blood can set thee free, and cleanse thy polluted soul. It is an overflowing fountain, always full. Its virtue is not in the least exhausted. Come then, ye despairing sinners! Come, thou dejected creature! the blood of Christ can remove all thy complaints. Thou mayest say with the Apostle, Rom. viii. 34. *Who is he that condemneth?* *It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* To him be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

CASE XXV.

How shall a person know, whether the obedience he performs, flows from true faith?

THE taking this serious and spiritual case under consideration, was occasioned by the reception of the following judicious letter; which indeed puts a question, that, at first appearance, seems very different from that now before me. However, upon an attentive view of the letter, and its principal design, it will appear, that the solution of the above case will answer the chief end of the letter. It runs thus:

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I WOULD humbly propose the following question to be answered; it may possibly be of use to others, in similar circumstances, as well as to myself.

“ The question is this, whether faith, as containing in its nature the soul’s assent to the great gospel promise of salvation, and consent that Jesus should be its Saviour in particular, according to the tenor of that promise, may not be looked upon as evidential of union to Christ, and the safety of my spiritual state in him? And whether a conscious perception of these actings of my understanding and choice may not be considered as criterions of true faith, and improved as such, although the joy of faith, vigour of hope, and ardour of affection, be for a time absent, and inward corruptions violently (at times) oppose the forming such a conclusion?

“ My reason for confining the query to the grace of faith, is, from the difficulty I find in ascertaining the truth of my love, repentance, opposition to sin, and even my obedience itself, unless all these appear in me to flow from faith in Christ as their principle.

“ Another reason is, in examining myself as to my state or frame, I find, that if my conscience is mistaken, or ignorant of the rule of God’s word, all the conclusions resulting from comparing my heart and ways with it must be wrong and uncertain in the same degree as my conscience is erroneous, and its testimony false. These things considered, make me very anxious to know the truth of my case. I am afraid of self-deceit. I have long been of opinion, that faith without works is dead, or rather is no faith at all; and I am equally certain, that works, however splendid, without faith as their animating principle, are dead works also. For the end of the *commandment is charity*, out of a *pure heart*, a *good conscience*, and *faith unfeigned*; which I am persuaded are either altogether, or else do not exist at all in my heart.

“ I remain your obliged Servant.”

IN perusing this epistle you will easily see, that the question, as first laid down, is rather put in a speculative than in an experimental form. But the evident scope and design of it is to enter deep into Christian experience. For which reason I have chosen to alter the form of the question, and place it in a more compendious and experimental view; which best comports with the design of this exercise, and at the same time will fully answer the end proposed by the letter; namely, to know whether our repentance, love, and obedience, be genuine and evangelical; or, in other words, whether our obedience flows from true faith.

Let me then observe, as an introduction to the whole; it is a great mercy, that the truth and reality of faith in our hearts does not depend upon the distinct knowledge of its nature and workings. Many persons doubtless have this divine principle wrought in them, and they feel its workings, though they know not how to describe its nature, or to give a proper account of its actings even in their own minds. It is indeed of some importance to have a doctrinal knowledge of this fundamental grace; because those that have, are the better able to judge concerning their own experiences, and may by their knowledge arrive at a more clear and solid satisfaction about their own state or frames. But yet it is abundantly more desirable and important to know it experimentally than doctrinally; and it is frequently found, than when a soul, under the influences of the Spirit, is drawn forth to exercise this amiable grace, there is such a mixture and such a variety of affections working, that it would be difficult to describe them, or conceive the manner in which they work. Let us not then be so solicitous to know the nature of faith in a doctrinal or controversial way, as to trace its chief evidences and appearances in our own souls, and its effects upon our actions and conduct.

To assist you in this examination, is the design of the following lines; and we shall be able to see the beautiful and experimental connexion between faith and obedience, by attending to these two interesting questions.

I. *What is that faith which produces true obedience?* And,

II. *What is that obedience which flows from true faith?*

I. *What is that faith which produces true obedience?* There are various sorts of faith mentioned in scripture, which have been exercised or experienced by the children of men. Some of which are of a spiritual and saving nature; but others are such kinds of faith, as may be in persons who are strangers to all true grace and holiness. It is therefore necessary that we should carefully distinguish between that sort of faith which produces true obedience, and that which can never produce it. There was a miraculous faith, whereby persons were able to perform miracles; which faith, however valuable, was notwithstanding exercised by some of those that knew nothing of the grace of God in truth. There is likewise an historical or speculative faith, whereby persons understand and believe the truths of the gospel with their heads, and in the notion of them. And many now have this sort of faith, who are dead in trespasses and sins. There is likewise a temporary faith, which is so much like to a true saving faith, that it is some

times very difficult to distinguish the one from the other. This temporary faith is that, whereby a person not only believes the truth in his notion, but has some sort of relish for it, approbation of it, nay, and feeling of it too in his mind. But after all, the truth only floats upon his affections, and does not enter deep into the heart and conscience.

Now neither of these forementioned sorts of faith is of such a nature as to produce true obedience. For nothing will produce true holiness, short of such an inward spiritual belief and impression of gospel truth, as effectually prevails upon the soul to go to and receive the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation.

Our friend in the letter inquires, whether an assent to, joined with an approbation of, the gospel method of salvation, be not sufficient to evidence the truth of our faith, and the safety of our state, although we may not have that joy, hope, and comfort, which some are favoured with? To which I readily answer, that doubtless our faith may be true and saving, though it be not attended with such satisfaction and assurance, as to fill the soul with peace and joy.

Faith may be true, and yet be very weak: it may be true, and yet be sadly suppressed or overborne as to its actings and exercises. Yea, it may be both true and strong, and yet be without much spiritual joy and consolation; for a strong faith may be overloaded with and borne down by temptations. A soul may truly go to Christ, though with a trembling heart, and may truly receive Christ, though with a trembling hand; and may have a strong reliance upon Jesus Christ, and yet be distressed and perplexed. But though all this be allowed, yet I cannot apprehend, that a mere assent to and approbation of Christ, and the method of salvation, is the whole that is included in that faith which produces true obedience. There must be some real application to Christ, and some real application of Christ to us, in order to answer this end.

Let us then see how the scriptures describe the essential actings of saving faith, and endeavour to render this important subject familiar to our minds, by comparing natural and spiritual things together.

Every one that has read his Bible with any attention, will see that true faith is frequently set forth by a coming to Christ, and receiving of him. Let us then take into consideration these two ideas, and see what we can learn from them for our instruction into the nature of true faith and its actings. In order to conceive of these things aright, we must take this

general rule with us;—Let us observe what is included in the act of a necessitous person, when he *goes to* a rich generous person for help, and *receives* a supply at his hand: only cast aside the mere external acts of coming and receiving, and see what thoughts and affections are working in his mind, when performing these external acts.

The reason why we are, in this comparison, to cast aside the external acts of the body, is, because faith is only a *spiritual* act of the mind and heart. Retaining therefore the spiritual part of these acts, we may draw the similitude between natural and spiritual coming and receiving to great advantage.

Let us then suppose a poor necessitous person to have heard of a generous and wealthy gentleman: how well soever he may know this generous person, how much soever he may know about him, and how much soever he may approve of his method of distributing his bounty; yet, if, after all, he does not actually go to this gentleman, and receive a supply from him, the necessitous person is still as poor as ever. So that his mere knowledge and approbation will not suffice without *coming* and *receiving*. On the other hand, let us suppose the necessitous person to have but little knowledge of this generous gentleman; to have only heard perhaps his name and character in general, yea, and to have some fears in his mind, lest he should not be accepted or supplied; yet if he has knowledge enough, and hope enough, to induce him to go, and goes accordingly, he receives the bounty, and is supplied. So that the smallness of his knowledge, and the greatness of his fears, are no effectual bar in the way of his receiving the benefit. From whence it appears, that there may be much knowledge of Christ, and some consent to the method of his grace, and no act of saving faith; while, on the contrary, there may be but little knowledge and many fears, and yet a true act of faith put forth. Some knowledge there must be of Christ, otherwise the sinner knows not where to go for salvation; and there must be a real approbation of Christ as a Saviour, or the sinner will never apply to him. But, by a close attention to this simile, and applying it to spiritual purposes, we shall see that, besides a mere *assent* and *consent*, there are in the act of saving faith these following particulars:

(1.) There is a *personal concern* in his heart, who exercises faith in Christ. A necessitous person will never go for a supply, unless he knows his own necessity, and is concerned about it. Thus, whenever a soul goes to Christ by faith, he has a real sight and sense of his own emptiness and necessity; he feels

his own wants pressing upon him; sees himself unable to obtain a supply for himself, by his own industry or merit; cannot be contented in his present starving or naked condition; and this awakens him to seek out after help for himself. An unconvinced, unconcerned soul does not, cannot, exercise an act of faith upon Christ. Thus then it is evident, that a true concern about the salvation of our souls, and about an interest in Christ, is necessary in an act of saving faith.

(2.) There is likewise a *probable hope* of acceptance and supply in that soul that actually goes to Christ for salvation. If a necessitous person conceives no probability of succeeding in his application, he will not go. Though a full *assurance* of his success is not absolutely necessary, yet *some hope* of it is, to encourage a poor person in his first setting out. This hope may indeed, in some cases, be as it were but a peradventure; but then it is such a probability as he believes he has not elsewhere. Like the lepers at the gates of Samaria; they knew that if they continued where they were, they should die; if they went into the city they knew they must perish there, because of the famine; but they conceived that if they went to the camp of the enemy, they may possibly be saved alive. This expresses the lowest degree of hope, that will be a foundation for making a trial. I mention this, not that convinced perishing souls may content themselves with such a weak hope. No, no; for I may boldly assure such distressed souls, that they have, from the promises of the gospel, the firmest ground to hope for success in their application to Christ. The difference between a sinner's going to Christ, and these lepers going into the camp of the Syrians, is very great. For these lepers went to the camp of an *enemy*; but a sinner, in applying to Christ, goes to him who is the *friend* of sinners, and has said, *him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.*

Only let me observe, that this probable hope, which a sinner has in the first actings of faith, is not founded upon any good he may fancy in himself, nor upon any duties he performs; but is founded entirely, and alone, upon the freeness of divine grace, and upon the report that the scriptures have given of Christ, as one ready to receive the most unworthy, to welcome the most guilty, and to supply the most necessitous. Thus then the sinner, in coming to Christ, not only approves of Christ, but has some degree of hope in him, by turning his eye towards, and fixing his thoughts upon, *the hope held forth in the gospel invitation.*

3. There is likewise an *actual application to Christ* made by

the soul that believes in his name. A necessitous person is not only concerned about, and desirous of a supply; not only hopes to receive it, but he, in consequence, actually applies for it. Thus the soul, in believing, having his *concern* raised by a sight and feeling of his own need, having his *desires* raised by a view of the fulness and suitableness of Christ, and having his *hope* raised by a belief of the freeness of the gospel, he forthwith addresses himself to Christ, or to God in Christ, by earnest prayer and supplication. He goes to the throne of grace, offers up his desires to God, lays forth his sinfulness and misery before God, and pleads the promises and invitations of the gospel. He voluntarily casts aside all his vain hopes, and throws himself upon the free mercy of God in Christ. Once more,

4. There is likewise a *spiritual application of Christ* made to the soul in the act of believing. A necessitous person not only comes for a supply, but he likewise *takes* it to himself, *receives* it for his own use; otherwise he is still never the better; he is still in the same necessity as before. Thus the soul in believing receives Christ and his blessings, Christ and his promises to itself, for its own use. The believer makes use of Christ's blood for his pardon, his righteousness for his justification, his promises for his support and comfort, and his fulness for his supply. The applying of Christ to ourselves in this way is a matter of the greatest consequence. It is what is expressed as a fundamental act of saving faith, John i. 12. *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* And what is it thus to *receive Christ*? It is something that is better experienced, than expressed. In this act, the soul takes Christ home to itself for its *own*; it appropriates him to itself, in all his characters and offices, as a free and complete Saviour. And though this may be done with a trembling hand, and a fearful heart, yet there is still in it, an application of Christ to ourselves, whereby we are enabled to apprehend him for ourselves. To express myself as plainly as I can upon this deep and spiritual subject, I would lay it forth in the following manner: the believer sees what himself and what Christ is, and makes an affecting comparison between what is in himself and what is in Christ. He sees that Christ's atonement answers to his own guilt; Christ's righteousness, to his own unworthiness; Christ's purifying Spirit, to his pollution; Christ's strength, to his weakness; Christ's riches, to his poverty; and Christ's fulness, to his own emptiness. Having

seen and been affected with this exact suitableness and correspondence of what is in Christ to his own wants, he is in some measure persuaded of Christ's freeness and willingness to give himself to his soul; and therefore ventures, humbly ventures, to take Christ home to himself. He applies Christ's atonement to his own guilt, and thereby answers the challenges of a guilty conscience: he applies Christ's righteousness to his own unworthiness, and thereby answers the objections that unbelief brings against him for it: he applies Christ's fulness and riches to his own emptiness and poverty, and thereby relieves his mind under these humbling views of himself, and says, "What though I am so guilty and unworthy, yet let me not be discouraged, for Christ is worthy: what though I am poor and empty, yet let me not despair, for in Christ all fulness dwells; and though I am all over polluted, yet let me not therefore despond, for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin." And thus the believer pacifies his conscience, silences his fears, supports his hope, satisfies and comforts himself in Christ, by a special application of Christ to himself. This appropriation is stronger or weaker, according to the degree of faith in exercise; and sometimes it can triumph over every fear, danger, and distress, by saying, *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.* Thus the soul and Christ are brought together into a spiritual and experimental union; and from hence it comes to pass, that the believer purifies himself by washing in Christ's blood; can perform duties in Christ's name and strength; can resist the devil, overcome temptation, surmount difficulties that lie in his way; out of weakness is made strong; and can do all things through Christ that strengthens him.

This, this is the *faith that works by love*, that produces true obedience. And unless Christ be in some degree thus applied to the soul, there is no strength for obedience, no true delight in it, nor any gospel motives to it inwrought in the heart. But if a soul, knowing and approving the method of salvation by the atonement, righteousness, and purchase of Christ, is really concerned about an interest in him, has some encouragement from the freeness of the promises, and thereupon applies to Christ for strength and salvation, and can now receive Christ to himself; he then begins to live upon Christ, and to work for him, from a principle of faith in him, and love to him. Thus evangelical repentance is excited, thus evangelical love is drawn forth, and thus evangelical obedience is performed.

I have here given you as distinct and regular an account, as

I am able, of the several particulars contained in that faith which produces true obedience. But after all, I dare not say that these various motions and actings of soul are always to be distinctly discerned in experience; for they are often so weak and imperfect in themselves, or so intermingled and confused with one another, that we cannot trace them distinctly. However, in the midst of all these confusions, the believing soul has such a regard for Christ, his grace and gospel, that what is seen, felt, and received, becomes the spring and motive of holy obedience in heart, lip, and life. The truth of our faith is best known by its influence and tendency, rather than by its distinct and particular actings, which are often so confused. If Christ be so received and applied, as that our views of him, regard to him, and reliance upon him, lead us to him and his grace for motives to raise our abhorrence of sin, for strength to subdue it, and for excitements to holiness of heart and life, we may be sure that our faith is true and genuine.

Give me leave to observe, before I pass to the other question proposed, that this representation of faith, as coming to and receiving Christ, is far from casting any discouragement in the way of the weak believer. Some may be ready to say, "Oh, if all this be contained in *true faith*, and if there be such an application of Christ to the soul in it, then I am destitute of it; for I could never venture thus to appropriate Christ to myself." But let me ask you, what is it that makes you thus afraid to take Christ home to your souls? Would you not be glad to do it, and is it not your great discouragement, that you fear you may not? Let me tell you, that this view of faith has in it the best and strongest encouragement to you. For hereby you are told, that if you can heartily approve of Christ, and have a real concern about an interest in his grace and righteousness, then you may and ought to go to him, plead with him, cast your souls upon him, and apply all that he has done, suffered, and purchased, to your own souls, for your satisfaction, supply, and consolation. Such a hope and comfort as this, I desire by all means to encourage; and would aim to make it appear to all the souls that are truly concerned, that they have a liberty, a free, unrestrained liberty, to trust in Christ for themselves, and to apply Christ to themselves. Surely you do not desire to be saved without Christ, or to be satisfied without an interest in him. I would not encourage such a desire, or promote such a satisfaction: what I want is to lead you to an application of Christ to yourselves, that you may be satisfied, comforted, and supported in him and by him.

And if you can, though in but a low degree, trust in, and rely upon Christ for yourselves, you may be then said in some measure to know and believe the love that God hath to you in Jesus Christ. In this way you will find strength both to work for Christ, and to fight against sin and Satan. Which brings me to the other part of this discourse.

II. *What is that obedience which flows from true faith?* The letter upon which this question is founded justly observes, that, *as faith without works is dead, so works without faith, as their animating principle, are dead also.* They are only splendid appearances, and little better than shining sins. Though I would by no means disparage good works, yet it is highly necessary that our works be of the right gospel stamp, otherwise they are unacceptable to God, and often delude our souls. But indeed when we come to weigh our works in the balance of the sanctuary, and bring them to the test of the gospel, I am ready to suspect, that not only all the works of unbelievers, but that many of the works, even of believers themselves, are dead works. For there are a great number of duties performed, in a legal, carnal, self-sufficient manner, by the children of God. Happy is he that can bring forth much spiritual fruit to the glory of God, by works of faith and labours of love; and we ought to be thankful, if in any instances we can prove that what we do is truly in the name and strength of the Lord Jesus. It is therefore necessary to remark, that when we put this question, *what is that obedience that flows from true faith?* it is not done so much with a design to determine a person's state, as to show the nature of his duty, and to give him a rule to judge when his works are done in a right manner. We must not conclude that we are destitute of divine grace, unless every act we perform is found to flow from true faith; for then the greatest believer in this world may well doubt and despond. All of us, even the best of us, will find reason to look back with shame upon many of our duties, and be obliged to confess that they have been dead works, having little or nothing of the divine life quickening them. Nay, we shall often detect ourselves of being kept back from some sins, and stirred up to some duties, by the most mean, carnal, and worldly motives, rather by restraining than by renewing grace. It is therefore much to be desired, that believers should know how to distinguish, not only good works from bad ones, but even the good works they perform in an evangelical manner, from those which are performed in a legal or carnal way. That we may know which we ought

to be peculiarly thankful for, and which to lament over, let me then lay down the following marks, by which to judge of those duties that flow from faith.

(1.) If our obedience flows from true faith, we are moved thereto not by *self-will*, but by a *regard to the authority and command of Christ*. Many services we perform, merely because they suit our inclination, fall in with our temper or conveniency, or because they are of our contrivance or invention. In this way persons may perform innumerable services, excellent in themselves, and agreeable to the divine word, and yet be little better than will-worship; because that which spurs us on to them, animates us in them, and carries us through them, is their being done at a time, and in a manner, that suits to our own tempers. But true faith teaches us to regard and reverence the authority of Christ: then whatever we perform, it is because Christ commands us; and whatever we avoid, it is because Christ forbids us. The obedience of faith teaches us to eye Christ as our Lord and Master, and we are desirous to follow him in his directions. We would not do any thing but by his commission and order, however it may suit our inclination; and would not omit any thing he calls for, however it may cross our own wills. Whatever we do, it is not so much to please ourselves, as to please Him who has an authority over our consciences, and a love to our souls.

(2.) If our obedience flows from true faith, we are moved thereto, not from any thing *visible*, but from a realizing view of things *invisible*. *We walk by faith, not by sight*. The generality of mankind are moved to do one thing, and avoid another, because of what they see or feel: all their motives are drawn from things within the verge of nature, and within the view of sense. But true faith teaches a person to look at, and live by, the things which are not seen, which are eternal; and it is a good sign our obedience is of the right kind, if we are excited to it, animated and supported in it, not merely by the applause or fear of man, but by a belief of those things which the gospel reveals concerning Christ's glory, grace, love, and salvation; all which are things unseen.

(3.) If our obedience flows from true faith, we are moved thereto, not from *self-righteousness*, but from *love to Christ*. When we avoid sin, or perform duty in a right manner, we do not think to work out a justifying righteousness thereby, either in whole or in part; neither do we aim hereby to make the least atonement for our sins. For these things, namely,

for pardon and justification, we look to Christ's blood and righteousness alone. But we work from love to Christ, knowing or hoping that he has loved us, and given himself for us. *The love of Christ constraineth us*; and then *we live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us, and rose again*. Self-righteous performances are not the obedience of faith; they are the direct contrary to it, as they oppose the very first fundamental principles of the gospel. Once more,

(4.) If our obedience flow from true faith, we enter upon our duties, not in our *own strength*, but in the *strength of Christ*. We know, we see, we feel, our own utter insufficiency to think a good thought, or perform a good work in a right manner. We are conscious to ourselves, that there will be no life nor spirit in our performances without the assistance or influence of Christ's grace; and therefore we engage in a duty, looking up for, and relying upon, the strength and spirit of Christ. Whereas self-sufficient performances betray our ignorance of the nature of true holiness and spiritual duty; and are neither acceptable to God, nor truly beneficial to ourselves.

Several more thoughts might be added, but let these suffice; only give me leave to recommend to you the serious perusal of Heb. xi. where you will be furnished with a variety of instances; all which show the nature of the obedience of faith, and will teach you to judge, whether what you perform flows from true faith or no.

I shall conclude the whole with *three* brief reflections.

1. *How impossible is it to be truly holy, and spiritually obedient, without faith in Christ and union to him!* Many think that their obedience is the way to, and the condition of, an interest in him. But, alas, all the obedience we perform before faith, is self-will, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency. There is not the least degree of acceptable obedience or *true* holiness previous to a union with Christ by faith; and all those who talk of true piety and virtue, without reliance upon Christ and love to him, know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If any therefore are desirous to become holy and evangelically obedient, let it be their first concern to fly to, and believe in, the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness and strength. We can never bring forth fruit to God, until we are dead to the law, and married to Christ, Rom. vii. 4. and we must become dead to the law, that we might live unto God, Gal. ii. 19.

2. *How imperfect and defective is the obedience of even true*

believers! It is happy indeed, when a Christian is so circumspect and conscientious in his services, that he is blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; when he is diligent and abundant in the work of the Lord: but if he seriously inquired which of his duties flowed from true faith, and were to cast aside all those performances that were attempted in his own strength, with a view to his own honour, and which he was moved to merely by his own will, or by things visible and sensible, there would then be but very few remaining to place among the number of truly good works. The believer may say, "It is true, I have done such a duty, attended such a service, or resisted such a temptation; but where has been my love to Christ, my dependence upon him, my view to his glory, in such a performance?"

If you, believers, have your thoughts clear, and your eyes open, to behold your own hearts and ways, you will find that your works have not been *perfect*, have not been *filled up* with true faith, love, and affection before God, as they ought to be. This is matter for deep and constant humiliation.

3. *How necessary is it to put good works in their proper place!* If they are misplaced, they are in a sense destroyed; all their excellency and value is lost. They must flow from faith in Christ, or they are good for little.

Place them after faith, as the fruit and evidence of it, and they are beautiful; they honour God, and are acceptable to him; but if they are once made the ground of our hope, of pardon, and justification, they become offensive to God, as they dishonour Christ, and overturn the scheme of the gospel. Let us then, all of us, be concerned to be obedient, and to perform all the works of righteousness that lie in our power; only see to it that they are performed from a sense of Christ's love, with a view to his glory, from a regard to his authority, and with a dependence upon his grace and Spirit.

CASE XXVI.

On Self-examination.

“ SIR,

“ I HAVE attended your *Wednesday* evening Lectures, and have heard you frequently exhorting the people to attend to the duty of self-examination. I acknowledge it is a very important duty, and I doubt not but it is often very useful; but I find it very difficult to go through it with any advantage to my soul. My heart is so averse to every thing that is serious, especially to a duty so close and interesting as this, that I know not how to go about it. I should be glad therefore to have it set in a proper light; how I must perform it; what are the fittest seasons for it; how I must view it, and what use I must make of it. In thus obliging me, you may be useful to others.”——

THAT self-examination is a duty, appears evident from scripture. *Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. A duty, you will easily see at first view to be of peculiar importance, as it tends to lay open the heart, and bring us to the knowledge of our state towards God. It is necessary and esteemed an act of prudence, for the merchant to look into his accounts, to see what condition his worldly concerns are in, that so he may not deceive himself, or injure others: certainly much more it is necessary for us all, to examine into the *state of our souls*, as these are concerns of infinite moment; as we are all hastening to an eternal world; and a mistake here, when death hath discharged its solemn office, can never be rectified.

The subject I am called to consider, is weighty indeed. It concerns you all; and therefore let me entreat your serious attention, whilst I endeavour to answer the following questions:

- I. *What must we examine into?*
- II. *In what manner must we do it?*
- III. *What are the fittest seasons for it?* And,
- IV. *In what light we should view it, and what use should we endeavour to make of it?*

May the answer to these questions strike our minds, and engage us diligently and frequently to attend to this duty, so as may be for the advantage of our souls.

1. *What must we examine into?*—It will be easy to determine what must be the matter of our inquiry, viz. the state of our souls, or things relating to our experience as Christians, in which the glory of God, and the peace and welfare of our souls are concerned. Particularly, when we set apart some time for this duty, we should chiefly be concerned to inquire into one or both of these things:

1. *Whether we are real Christians or not?* And,

2. *Whether we are growing or declining Christians?*

1. *We should inquire whether we are real Christians or not.*

This is a point of the greatest importance. If we are Christians indeed, all things shall go well with us, both in life and at death, in time and eternity. But if we have only the name, however we may live in earthly pleasure, it will be awful dying. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,* John iii. 36. How many have been, and are still in the melancholy state of the foolish virgins,—have the form of godliness, but know nothing of the power of it? We read of the *hope of the hypocrite*, which shall perish, Job viii. 13. What will become of his hope and him, *when God taketh away his soul?* Job xxvii. 8. As this is the case then, sure we should all be concerned to make a strict and solemn inquiry, what character we fall under, what state we are in. Would you know whether you are passed from death unto life, look back to the time when you think the change was made, and inquire into the circumstances attending it. What view had you of yourself, of sin, of Christ? Did you see your lost, miserable, and wretched condition, and was you made willing to renounce all that stood in competition with the Redeemer, and to receive him in all his mediatorial characters?—Many cannot remember when the change was made; therefore, do you inquire what evidences can you produce of the grace of God in you. Do you hate sin? Do you desire therefore above all things to be delivered from it? Is it your daily burden? And does heaven appear peculiarly amiable, because there sin will be no more? What is your faith? *He that believeth shall be saved,* Mark xvi. 16. Is Christ the object of your faith; Christ, as he is represented in the gospel? Do you go to him for righteousness to justify you; his Spirit to sanctify you; and his whole salvation to be bestowed upon you?—*What is*

your humility? Do you appear vile in your own eyes? Are you filled with self-aborrence? Do you see nothing in yourself, nothing in your services, and are you willing to receive salvation, as the free gift of God, and to admire his rich distinguishing grace in the bestowment of it? Do you seek after a submission to the dispensations of his providence, not dictating to infinite wisdom, or censuring his conduct, but thinking honourably of all his ways, and desiring to say always, *Father, not my will, but thine be done?*—*What is your hope?* Does it lull you to security, and encourage you to take your ease, for all is well? Or does it put you upon duty, enliven you in it, reconcile you to afflictions, animate you with zeal, and put you upon seeking after purity of heart and life?—*What is your love?* Can you say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee?* When Christ is present, do you rejoice? When he withdraws, are your souls grieved? When he is dishonoured, do you mourn? Do you long after clearer views and fuller enjoyments of Christ?—These, and such like questions, should be put to your soul, when inquiring into your state.

2. *Another subject of inquiry is, whether we are growing or declining Christians.* Inquire, *Do you see more of the odiousness of sin?* Do you grow more confirmed in this great truth, *that you are nothing?* Are your views clearer of your weakness and poverty, of the glory and suitableness of Christ, and of the excellency of the gospel? *How are your corruptions?* Are they as prevalent as usual? Are not your affections more mortified to the world? Does pride possess your breast as much as ever? Does passion still boil in you, and lead you aside as often as before? Are you as much entangled with lust, as easily conquered? Have you got no victories over sin, got no steps forward in your journey, added no cubits to your spiritual stature?—*Are you not in some measure more like your Lord?* Have you more of his divine temper? Are you therefore more meek and lowly in heart; more patient and submissive to your Father's pleasure, more active and diligent in promoting his glory, and more concerned to live usefully and profitably?—*In what condition is your faith?* Does it grow stronger? Do you feel more of its purifying influences?—*Do you love Jesus and his people more than you did?* Are you more afraid of offending your Redeemer, more desirous of honouring him, more humble under a sense of the little you do for him, and longing more after a better world, where you shall love and praise him for ever?—Finally, *Are*

you become more spiritual, more heavenly in your temper, your duties, your conversation; more circumspect in your walk; and more concerned to fill up every relation and character in such a manner, as you may adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things?—Thus inquire into these two important points, whether you are Christians, and what progress you have made; whether you have reason to say, Oh, that it was with me, as in months past, and so to be humbled under a conviction of a decline; or whether you have reason to admire distinguishing grace, for any advances in holiness, and growth in experience?

II. *In what manner must we examine ourselves, or how must we perform this duty?*—If we do not attend to it in a proper manner, it will be of no real advantage. That the ends of it may be answered therefore, let us,

1. *Look up to the Spirit by prayer for his assistance.* If you have set apart some time for this duty, begin with prayer. You will have but little satisfaction, if the Spirit is not with you. You will be ready either to draw a shade over the work of God in your heart, and so come from the duty under discouragements, or, else you will perhaps take that for real saving experience, which is not so, and so run into presumption. Be earnest with God therefore to be with you; to impress you with a deep sense of the great importance of the duty you are entering upon, that you may not trifle with God, and your own soul; to enable you to examine your heart thoroughly, and as in his presence; and if he has given you an experience of renewing grace, that he would shine upon his work, that your evidence of the Christian may clearly appear; or if you have been deceiving yourself with false hopes, that he would convince you of it. Wrestle with God for his presence, if you would succeed in the duty.

2. *Do not make marks yourself, but observe and try yourself by those which God has given you in his word.* Some make marks of the Christian themselves, just as their fancy leads them, and are either deceiving themselves by them, or else drawing uncomfortable conclusions concerning their state. The hypocrite thinks it is enough to attend ordinances, and go through a round of duties, and so is resting upon a sandy foundation. The Christian is ready to make a comfortable frame, lively affections, a warm heart, &c. marks of grace, and therefore is often ready to look upon himself as a hypocrite. Look into scripture, and see what God has made marks of the Christian, and do not let fancy be your guide in a matter of

such importance. *Distinguish between marks of grace, and marks of growth in grace*, and apply each to their proper subjects in your inquiries. For instance, if you would know whether you are a Christian, do not inquire into the measures or degrees of faith, love, &c. but into the *reality* of them. A *weak faith* renders the Christian as safe as a strong faith; and a *spark* of real love is an evidence of a saving change, though it is not blown up into a flame.

3. *Be impartial in this duty of self-examination.* The Christian and the hypocrite are both ready to be too partial; the last in his own favour, the other against himself. The hypocrite can see *every thing* that is encouraging; he doubts not but all is well: whereas the Christian can see *nothing* in himself that is good. As the woman of *Canaan* by faith turned every discouragement into an argument; so, the Christian, on the other hand, too often through the power of unbelief turns every appearance of grace into an objection. Give every thing its due weight. Do not stop, as you are ready to do, at a view of your imperfections. Do not say, I need go no farther, here is evidence enough of my hypocrisy; but go farther, and see what of the Christian you can observe, and weigh both impartially.

4. *If you can find but one mark, you may draw a favourable conclusion.* A real mark of grace, is the actings of grace; and therefore, whenever you can see but one mark, you may comfortably conclude that God has begun a good work in your heart. Should you have reason to conclude that you *love the brethren*, love them for the image of Christ in them, you need not hesitate about your state; for this love is the exercise, or goings-out of that grace, God has implanted. Sometimes one mark appears visible and sometimes another. If you have but one, be thankful, and give God all the glory. I might add some other directions, but I pass on to the third question.

III. *What are the fittest seasons for self-examination?* It is a duty that should be frequently attended to. *Every day* we should be looking within, and taking a view of our hearts. *At the conclusion of the day*, we should be concerned to ask our souls such questions as these—How have I spent this day?—What sins have I fallen into?—What frame have I been in?—What advantage have I gained in my way to Zion?—*When we have been reading the word*, it will be proper to examine ourselves by it; what we have seen in it; what have we experienced of it; and how we may improve it?—*After*

prayer, we may inquire into our frame, our views, and our experience in prayer.—These and many other opportunities God, in his providence, is giving us, to look into ourselves.—But there are seasons more peculiarly set apart for self-examination, when we should look back upon many years, compare the frames and experiences of one year with those of another, see how God has been dealing with us, that we may come to some conclusion concerning our state.—I shall only mention three hints, as they will be some direction to us as to proper seasons.

1. *When we have most time to go through this duty.* It should not be hurried over, but attended to with the greatest deliberation, because it relates to the state of our souls. We should therefore endeavour to set apart as much time as we can, that our minds may be composed, that we may not trifle with God or our own souls, but may attend with that solidity and seriousness which the subject requires, and may take a thorough view of things. Let not this lead you to a constant neglect of the duty, pleading as an excuse that you have not proper time for it; but let it rather put you upon striving to order your affairs so, that you may have these opportunities frequently returning.

2. *When our thoughts are like to be most disengaged from this world, and most free from interruption.*—As the week days do not afford us many opportunities for this duty, we should often fix upon the *Lord's day*. Now we are free from business, we hear the word, and engage in spiritual duties; all which tend to bring us into a serious and composed frame. When you have been at God's house, then retire into your closet in the afternoon, shut the door about you, and there not only call over the word you have heard, and look into your present frame, but set yourself upon this solemn work, look back, and take an impartial view of things, and try to come at a knowledge of your state and experience. Any other day likewise, when you find yourself in a serious frame, set apart an hour for this important purpose.

3. *When any thing in providence more peculiarly calls us to this work.*—Here I would mention three seasons that seem to invite you to this duty.—*When you are going to wait upon Christ at his supper.* For this you have the direction of the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. ii. 28. This is a *public surrender to God*, and therefore you should inquire whether you are heartily willing to give up yourself wholly to Christ. This ordinance is designed peculiarly for the people of God. It is necessary

therefore that you should inquire whether you are one or not, lest you should take that which God has designed for his own children.—*Another season is affliction.* This duty seems proper to be attended to, when God's hand is upon us. Many are ready to think afflictions inconsistent with God's love. Inquire therefore *whether you are a Christian or not*; it may be a means of supporting your soul, whilst you see the rod in a Father's hand.—*Inquire into your sins.* Perhaps you may hereby see the cause of your afflictions, and see matter for humiliation, as well as be made sensible of the ends God had in view in afflicting you, and so be directed in the way of your duty.—Lastly, *Another season proper for this duty is, when Eternity is approaching*:—Then, as good old Jacob, you should view the conduct of divine providence towards you, and see what appears in your whole life, as an evidence of the Christian. How happy will it be, if, upon a diligent examination, you should be enabled through grace to say, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!* How pleasant will it be to die! How will your soul long to hear the chariot wheels of your Redeemer coming!—And on the other hand, if you are not a Christian, to die in this state will be inconceivably awful. And how happy to be made sensible of it, and find your soul willing to fly to Jesus, if it be but at the last hour!—Thus these appear to be all fit seasons for this important duty.—Let us now consider the last question.

IV. *In what light must we view this duty, and what use should we endeavour to make of it?* Some look upon, and represent self-examination as *legal*, and that comfort that arises from marks and evidences as not truly evangelical; but objections of this kind will fall to the ground, when we consider the following particulars.

1. *Self-examination is not designed to make us proud, but to fill us with admiration*: This use we are to make of it. If in this duty any marks and evidences of the Christian appear, we must not be lifted up, as if we were something; but be humble, giving God all the glory. This is the improvement which the Christian desires to make of this duty; this is the frame it leads him into. Has he any reason to conclude that he is a child of God? See how his soul is melted with a view of the grace of God—"Oh, why should God look upon a creature so unworthy! Am I indeed a Christian? Need I not dispute it? Is there a change made in my heart? Oh, what grace, what

grace is that which God has manifested to me! what grace to pluck *me* as a brand out of the fire! View it, my soul, and ever adore and admire."

2. *Self-examination is not to lull us into security, but to quicken us.* Do any marks of the Christian appear? We must not say, *Soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.* Thou art a child of God, and nothing can ever cast thee out of his favour. They that draw such conclusions, have never yet received the grace of God. A view of God's love to us should and will quicken and enliven us in duty.—"Oh, what shall I render unto the Lord for such distinguishing grace? O love the Lord, O my soul, and never loiter in the service of him, who has laid thee under such peculiar obligations to love and honour him for ever." If no marks appear, then we have no reason to conclude that we are Christians; this should rouse and alarm us, and stir us up to seek after an acquaintance with the divine life.

3. *We must not depend upon this duty for justification, but use it as a means to promote our comfort and sanctification.* If we can see any traces of the image of God in us, we have reason to rejoice. For this purpose it is, that the Spirit comes and lets the soul see his interest in the Redeemer; it is that we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And who cannot, who does not, at such a discovery? As this view fills the soul with joy, so it gives him a hatred of sin, melts him into godly sorrow, subdues the power of sin more and more in him, and so promotes his sanctification. If we have not these ends in view in this duty; if we think we have now enough to justify us before God, and so depend upon our own righteousness for eternal life, we give no evidence that we have experienced a saving work in our souls.

4. *After all therefore, we should keep close to Christ, looking to him for all righteousness for justification, and all strength and grace for sanctification.* It all is dark within, and we can see nothing to encourage us to conclude that we are the children of God, yet be not dejected, but look to Christ. Our salvation does not depend upon our seeing ourselves Christians, but upon our being united to Christ. Do not be discouraged; this is not the ground of your hope, but only the means of your comfort.—If we find what we seek after, viz. the marks of the Christian; yet, whilst we are rejoicing that we are the heirs of God, let us depend upon Christ for righteousness to justify us, for all grace and strength to enable us to persevere in faith and holiness, till we come to the full and everlasting

enjoyment of him in heaven. Thus we are to improve this duty. Hence,

Let me ask you concerning this duty, Are there not some of you, who have never yet examined how the case stands with you? Do not your consciences upbraid you with negligence? Do you not blush at your folly? Do you please yourselves with the thoughts that man sees you not in your closets, that your friends know not but you are engaged in duty? But alas, alas, what a poor comfort is this, when God knows and sees your neglect! You yourselves are conscious of it, your souls are starving, eternity is drawing near, and yet you know not how it is with you. You are careful as to outward things, pursuing pleasure, wealth; but have never yet sat down and asked, Am I fit to die? How is it with my soul? Oh, my friends, if ye have any regard for your peace, your happiness in life, at death, make the inquiry, how it is with you? It is a reasonable request I ask. It is with a desire after your salvation. To-morrow you may be in eternity. There is much to be done before you are fit to die; and yet see, you have not asked a single question seriously about it! It is time to awake. Thinkest thou to sleep on so till death approaches? Was it not for thy soul, sleep on: but to see an immortal creature in danger of falling into everlasting fire, is enough to raise my compassion, and calls loudly upon me to endeavour to rouse thee. Awake, awake, O soul, get up and examine thyself!—Some of you may be afraid to look within, afraid to see what is there. You are suspicious that things are bad, and you would avoid the sight, you would fly from it; but oh, you cannot. Should you stifle conscience, and lull it asleep for the present; yet the time is coming when you can no longer withstand the force of conviction; when conscience will awake, and fill you with everlasting sorrows, if found strangers to Christ. Oh, inquire then what is the state of your souls!

As God has now brought us to the close of this lecture, so it may not be improper for each of us to examine into our views, frames in it, and improvements of it.—Let us, my dear brethren, inquire, what ends we have had in view in engaging in it? How have we attended to it? with seriousness, with an affectionate concern for souls, with earnest prayer for assistance and success? Do *you* examine, who have attended this lecture? What frame have you attended in? What were your views; only to gratify a vain curiosity, or to meet with Jesus, to have your doubts resolved, and your souls brought neare to God? What benefit have you received? Have you seen more of your

own hearts, more of the suitableness and glory of Christ; and been more and more established and grounded in the faith?—Thus let us all be examining into the state and frame of our souls.—Let this be our frequent employment; and let us rejoice more in the prospect of that world, where all our cases of conscience will be fully answered, every dark cloud forever scattered; where every fear will vanish, and our souls be possessed of complete and uninterrupted happiness in the everlasting enjoyment of God. *Amen.*

CASE XXVII.

In what frame does the sinner come when he savingly closes with Christ?

THIS question is of great importance, and deserves a particular consideration, as it peculiarly tends to direct the inquiring soul how to come to Jesus, to convince the hypocrite of his being destitute of the grace of God, and to satisfy the humble Christian that he has been enabled to come aright, that he has therefore an interest in the Redeemer, and shall be a partaker of all the blessings of his purchase. I am not here to consider how such an alteration is brought about in the sinner, that from an enemy to, he is made an admirer, and becomes a follower of a despised Jesus. This is owing to the free and all-conquering influences of the grace of God. The inquiry is, how the sinner comes to Jesus, when the Spirit has fastened saving convictions upon his mind? In what frame he comes? What are the workings of his mind at the time that he closeth with the Redeemer, and makes a surrender of his soul into his hands? If we look back and consider how it was with us, at the time of our espousals; if we take a view of the convinced and humbled sinner; and if we look into the word of God, where we have the sinner represented, in his state of enmity, under his convictions, in his closing with Jesus, and in his progress through the Christian life, we shall find that the frame of his soul, at the time he comes to Jesus, is suitable to the convictions the Spirit has set home upon his mind:—Thus,

I. *The Spirit has convinced him of his guilty condition; answerably to which convictions, he comes to Christ in an humble and an admiring frame.*—There must be a conviction of sin, else there will never be a dependence upon, and a looking to, Christ for salvation. It is the sick person that applies to the physician, and not the healthy and vigorous, Matt. ix. 12. We are all ready to acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, but we never have a true humbling sense of sin, till the Spirit comes and gives us a view of it. The Spirit gives the soul a view of sin, what it is, how directly it is levelled at all the perfections of God, what an abuse of divine goodness, what a contempt of his law, and what ingratitude it carries in it, and how justly it exposeth us to his everlasting indignation. This leads the sinner to admire the infinite patience and long-suffering of God, in continuing so guilty a creature in life, and that he was not long since sentenced to the infernal prison. The sinner under his convictions is all astonishment, all humility. The lion is turned into a lamb: the proud rebel, who a few moments before would suffer no controul, is now lying prostrate at the feet of Jesus, and all his cry is *Mercy, mercy*: see every proud thought that exalted itself against God removed, the haughtiness of the sinner brought low, and the poor convinced creature in deep distress and humiliation, smiting upon his breast, and admiring infinite grace and compassion that he is not in hell.

The Spirit takes different methods with sinners in conviction of sin. Sometimes he opens the heart, and gives us a view of that fountain of corruption that lies there; at another time he brings some actual sin, sets it before the soul in all its aggravations and deserts; and at another time draws up a whole catalogue of sins, with which a poor creature stands chargeable before God, and so convinces him of his miserable and wretched condition. There is a great difference likewise as to legal terrors, both as to the degrees of them, and as to their continuance. Some know not what legal terrors mean; they see themselves guilty, but their souls are not discouraged with the view; their hearts are opened at once, and they receive the Redeemer, and rely upon him, sweetly pleading his righteousness for pardon and salvation. Others are pricked at the heart, and like the jews under Peter's preaching, are full of awful astonishment at a view of their wretched condition; or, like the Jailor, come in deep agony of soul, and under all the terrors of an awakened conscience, cry out, *Oh, what must we do to be saved?* Acts ii. 37.—xxi. 29, 30. Some lie for some

considerable time under awful and distressing views of sin, and filled with the deepest compunction and contrition for it, before they are cheered with the view of pardoning mercy; others just feel the smart, and are led to Jesus. As soon as they are wounded, they are healed. But in all those cases, where there is a saving work of the Spirit, there is such a conviction of sin, as to humble the soul. All see themselves lost and undone without a Saviour; all confess their guilt, fall down at the footstool of God's throne, and there acknowledge their sins with every aggravation; charge themselves with the greatest ingratitude, appear in their own apprehensions deserving of everlasting burnings, confess how much they have dishonoured God, and wonder and admire at infinite compassion, that they are prisoners of hope, and have any encouragement to expect an interest in pardoning mercy. All this is strongly represented in the parables of the Publican and the Prodigal. What a deep sense has the Publican of his unworthiness! how humble! he is afraid to draw nigh, lest that should be esteemed presumption; he therefore stands afar off. He dare not lift up his eyes towards heaven, the place of God's habitation, sensible he had not the least reason to expect an admittance there; with his eyes therefore fixed upon the earth, and with the deepest sense of guilt, he smites upon his breast, in a token of his wretchedness, and though unworthy to be received, and fit only to be thrown into hell, yet he ventures to speak to God; but all his plea is mercy, *God be merciful to me a sinner*, Luke xviii. 13. Thus beautifully and strongly is this humble frame represented in the parable of the prodigal son, Luke xv. 17, &c. He had wasted his substance in riotous living, and been guilty of the greatest ingratitude to a kind and indulgent father; when he therefore comes to be sensible of it, how is his soul humbled! See how he approaches the Father whom he had abused! he falls down at his feet, makes a free and full confession of his sins, and only begs to be admitted as a servant. *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.* I have forfeited the amiable title of a son; I can no more expect to be treated as a child; I have forfeited every endearment of a father; I ask it not therefore; only let me be admitted as a servant; that is all I at present crave: I dare look no further.—Thus the frame in which the sinner comes to Jesus is humble.

II. *The Spirit convinces the sinner of the infinite purity and holiness of God, the odiousness of sin, and the imperfections*

attending all his religious duties.—He comes to Jesus therefore filled with self-abhorrence, and renouncing all his poor services, as being insufficient to justify him before God.—As the sinner is to be brought to an entire dependence upon, and a hearty acceptance of Jesus Christ in all his characters, so the Spirit takes those methods with him that have a direct tendency to bring about this important end. For this purpose, therefore, he gives him some suitable conceptions of God. He had perhaps before, as many others, conceived of and represented him as a being of infinite benevolence, goodness, and mercy, but now, though he adores his mercy, that shining perfection of his nature, yet he has a striking view of his infinite justice, purity, and majesty: together with this, the Spirit gives the sinner a view of the odiousness of sin; how contrary it is to the holiness of God, to his holy law, and what deformity it has introduced into the soul; the understanding, will, and affections, being sadly polluted. This fills him with self-abhorrence: he finds himself *carnal and sold under sin*, when compared with God and his law, Rom. vii. 14. He finds such an inconformity of soul to the divine nature, that he appears vile and detestable. He sees so much of the malignity of sin, that his breast is filled with a hatred of it, and he cannot forgive himself, for so greedily pursuing that which has so much obliquity in it. The Spirit does not indeed make a full discovery to the soul at first of the malignity of sin: this he does gradually as he carries on his work; the evil of sin and the plague of his heart are laid open more and more, to raise his abhorrence of himself; but at first he gives the sinner such a view of the odiousness of sin, as to make him appear vile in his own eyes, and really despicable. Thus he styles himself the very *chief of sinners, less than the least of all God's mercies*. He is filled with a self-loathing, with *shame and confusion of face*; and thus he comes to the Redeemer. And though before he was ready to lean upon a few religious duties he had performed, yet now he sees such defects in them, as to make them absolutely unworthy of the acceptance of an infinitely holy God, and therefore unfit for a guilty creature's dependence. He comes therefore renouncing all his own righteousness, and with the church, esteeming it but *as filthy rags, and an unclean thing*, Isa. lxiv. 6. He is now in a great measure emptied of self. Under first convictions indeed he might fly to duty, under an apprehension that this would remove his fears, and ease his conscience; but now he comes to Jesus, he sees his poverty; he comes naked. He is far from a Laodicean temper. He is not puffed up with

the Pharisee, endeavouring to quiet the clamours of conscience with what he has done; but comes renouncing all his religious privileges, all his shining gifts, and all the duties he has done, being convinced that all of them put together are incapable of appeasing an infinitely righteous Judge, and of entitling him to an everlasting felicity.

III. *The Spirit convinces the sinner of the suitableness and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ: this is accompanied with warm desires after him, a high esteem for him, and a thankful acceptance of, and obedience to him.* The Spirit does not leave the poor sinner when he has convinced him of his nakedness and misery. As he is the glorified of Christ, so, he takes of his things and shows them unto him, John xvi. 14. Has he no righteousness to justify him before God; he presents him with a fulness of righteousness in the Redeemer; righteousness that is pure and perfect, that has been approved of and accepted by the Father, and that has infinite and everlasting virtue and efficacy in it, and therefore is perfectly suitable to the case of a guilty sinner. Is he guilty? There is pardon purchased by the great Mediator, free and full pardon for every sin. Is he miserable and wretched? There are riches of salvation in Christ, yea, *durable riches and righteousness*, Prov. viii. 18. Is he weak? There is strength in Jesus, the Mighty God. Is he unworthy? Christ is worthy, for whose sake all the blessings of grace and glory should be given him. In fine, are his circumstances of the greatest indigence; is he made up of wants? Christ is all fulness to answer his condition. Now such a view as this, cannot fail of raising in the sinner, an esteem for such a Saviour, fill him with desires after him, and make him thankfully accept of him. Is it so, says the sinner? Is Jesus *able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him?* and will he look upon such a poor, vile, despicable creature as I am? Oh blessed news! let me not stay a moment, oh my soul; let me fly to this Saviour: let me love him, trust my everlasting all with him, receive him, and trust in him, as my righteousness and strength. When the sinner sees a door of hope thus opening, and that Jesus is the person that has done it for him, he is alive, admires, adores, loves, desires, and comes, and ventures his soul upon Christ, and trusts in him, for all that salvation he stands in need of.—And thus the frame in which the soul comes savingly to Christ, is a depending believing frame.

IV. *He is convinced of the necessity and beauty of holiness, of the love of Jesus Christ in giving himself for such guilty*

creatures, and this is accompanied with an entire, obediential, and submissive frame. The soul is brought not only to the obedience of faith in Christ, as the Lord his righteousness, but to take him in all his characters. Before his convictions he was ready to say, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?* I cannot relish so many duties; I cannot think of enduring reproaches and persecutions for Christ. If he makes a profession, it is only an empty one; and that perhaps the effect of custom and education, or occasioned through the authority and influence of his friends. But when the Spirit works upon his heart, and brings him to the feet of Jesus, he gives up himself a willing subject to the Redeemer, agreeably to what the Father promises the Son, Ps. cx. 3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.* The love of Christ now constrains him; and as Jesus has done so much for him, he cannot refuse him so small and reasonable a request as his heart. He yields himself a cheerful sacrifice. He chooses Christ and his service before all the pleasures of sin. He willingly parts with his *Dalilahs*, takes Christ as his Lord and King, takes him with his cross, and is willing to employ all the powers of his soul for his Redeemer's glory, and to be entirely at his disposal. He is willing to have his corruptions all subdued, his Redeemer's image implanted, and to be ruled and governed constantly by his laws.—Thus we see, what is the frame in which a sinner closeth with Jesus Christ, what are the workings of his mind. Not that these things may be so distinctly and separately ranged in the soul at first; yet he has a general sense of them, and in time distinctly considers them in all their importance. To illustrate what has been said the more, let us represent a sinner under these serious and important impressions coming to Jesus. Methinks I see him struck with conviction, falling down before God, and breaking out in some such manner as this:—"Lord, what a guilty creature am I! Why hadst thou not long ago cut me off, and sent me to the infernal regions, to receive the just reward of my sins? Against thee, thee have I sinned, and done innumerable evils in thy sight: I have absolutely forfeited the blessings I am come to thee for; yet stretch forth the hand of thy mercy, and get to thyself a name and a praise in the salvation of one so unworthy. Oh the infinite patience and long-suffering of God to a wretch so provoking! Lord, I am all sin. I am a lost, undone, perishing creature. I thought once all was well; I boasted of my duties. I apprehended myself rich, but now I see I am miserable, and blind, and naked, have nothing to

recommend me to thy favour, but enough to make thee view me with detestation and abhorrence. Lord, I have nothing to plead, but free mercy; nothing to depend upon, but that blessed sacrifice, which I would ever have in the most grateful remembrance. Oh Jesus, thou art the only able Saviour. A sense of my need of thee, has filled that heart, that was all enmity to thee, with desires after thee. How suitable dost thou appear in all thy characters! I hope I now love thee, I now feel my heart melting under the all-conquering influences of thy love. I would now be thankful for thy undertaking, adore thine infinite grace, that such a wretch has encouragement to come unto thee; and I would come, abhorring myself, and repenting in dust and ashes. I would come renouncing all my poor despicable duties and services; I would be clothed with thy righteousness, and thine only. Lord, I would come, giving up all my sins, my pleasures, all my worldly interest, and I would take thee with thy cross, thy reproaches and difficulties, esteeming it greater riches to have an interest in thee, than were I possessed of all the world. Here I am, Lord, at thy feet; I would make an unreserved surrender of myself to thee, to thy guidance, government, and disposal. Do with me whatsoever seemeth good in thy sight, so I may but be an object of thy favour here, and be happy in thy everlasting presence above." This is a true evangelical frame of soul. This is the frame in which the sinner comes to Jesus for salvation; and whoever has been enabled to come in the manner that has been represented, has savingly closed with Jesus Christ, and he is really and actually united to, and interested in him. For the particular satisfaction of the soul, I would prove by the three following things, that he that thus comes, comes savingly to Jesus Christ.

1. *This frame of soul is every way answerable to the ends God has in view in the scheme of salvation.*—The great end God has in view in the whole of our salvation, is to glorify and exalt the infinite riches of his sovereign grace, and to keep the creature from boasting. All the methods therefore that he has taken, have that particular tendency. Thus the objects he has pitched upon are sinners, oftentimes some of the most contemptible sinners, that they may not have the least apparent ground of boasting. Those that are brought to the marriage-supper are not the rich, the honourable; but the lame, the halt, and the blind, and such as are in highways and hedges, the most despised part of mankind, Luke xiv. 23. *Ye see your calling, brethren,* says the Apostle, *how that not many wise men*

after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. And why is all this? That no flesh should glory in his presence, 1 Cor. i. 26—29. He has likewise fixed upon the weakest means to bring about the conversion and salvation of his chosen people; and all, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man, that so he may be glorified. Thus the frame of soul in which the sinner comes to Jesus, is answerable to these views. He comes humble, he is emptied of self; he admires divine patience and grace; he pleads free mercy, and lies at the feet of Christ an humble suppliant, depending upon him alone for acceptance. This frame then, so exactly corresponding to the ends God has in view in the whole scheme of salvation, makes it appear to be a true gospel frame, shows that we come aright to Christ, and shall meet with acceptance in him.

2. *This frame corresponds with the representations we have of Jesus Christ in the gospel.*—How is he represented, but as our righteousness and strength, our wisdom, our all and in all? He is held forth as the object of our faith, as the only foundation of our hopes of eternal life. He is represented as the *true vine*, being the only fountain of all spiritual life to his people, and having in him an inexhaustible fulness of all grace for the supply of all our wants, John xv. 1. He is called *the Lord our righteousness*, Jer. xxiii. 6. to signify that he is all in justification. He is our *green fir-tree*, all our fruitfulness depends upon him, Hos. xiv. 8. In fine, *without him we can do nothing*, John xv. 5. Agreeable to these and such-like representations of Christ is that frame we have been considering; and therefore I conclude it is a right frame, and all such as come so to Christ, have an interest in him. If the sinner owns Jesus in all his characters; gives him the glory of all his characters; receives him as his righteousness, his strength, his all, he certainly comes aright, and has that faith which is saving.

3. *This frame is agreeable in the experience of the saints recorded in the word of God.*—It is the frame recommended by our Lord in the parable of the Pharisee and Publican. It is the frame the prodigal is represented as coming in to the Father, and which the Father owns and approves of, Luke

xv. 20, &c. It is the frame David appeared in when sensible of his backslidings, and receiving a fresh assurance of pardon, 2 Sam. xii. Ps. li.—Peter appeared in this very frame when he was restored after his fall, Luke xxii. 62.—And Saul, the obstinate Jew, the rigid Pharisee, appeared to be under the same impressions, and manifested the same spirit at his conversion. He had a deep sense of sin, and he absolutely despaired of ever obtaining eternal life by his own righteousness, Rom. vii. 9. he desired to be found in Christ, clothed with his perfect and everlasting righteousness, Phil. iii. 9. and made a full surrender of himself into the hands of Jesus, to do with him, and dispose of him, as he pleased, Acts ix. 6. and he trembling and astonished, said, “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” Here I am at thy feet, thy conquest; the triumph of thy grace; I willingly yield myself a sacrifice to thee, take me, Lord, and rule in me, direct, order me where and as thou pleasest, I am ready to follow thee in all things.”—Upon the whole, we may with the greatest satisfaction and readiness conclude, that the frame that has been described is a true evangelical frame, and that in general it is the real frame in which every sinner savingly closeth with Christ.—Let me now then see how this case may be improved.—And here I would address myself,

1. *To those that are inquiring the way to Zion, and crying out, What shall we do to be saved?*—Art thou, oh soul, under the apprehensions of guilt? Art thou lost and undone without an interest in the Saviour? Art thou sensible that Jesus only can deliver thee? And art thou saying, How shall I come to him? I am altogether unworthy of his notice; I deserve his everlasting frowns: I have nothing to say to move him to look upon me, unless this will do it, that I am miserable, wretched, blind, and naked: and will he receive such a creature?—Thus come, oh inquiring soul; this is the best frame thou canst come to thy Redeemer in. Come thus, and thou shalt find acceptance. Art thou unworthy? come and tell the Mediator. Let him know thy wants; tell him of thy desires; give up thy all into his hands, and plead his own free gracious promise, that *he that comes to him he will in no wise cast out*, John, vi. 37. This is to come aright; this is the temper, the spirit of the gospel; and be assured thou shalt meet with a hearty welcome. Jesus will take thee into his bosom: open all his heart to thee, give thee his presence here, and make thee eternally happy with himself in the mansions above. Thy unworthiness shall be no obstruction: thy crimson sins shall all be washed

away. Jesus gives all his blessings freely; he gives them to the most unworthy.

2. *I would address myself to the Christian who is afraid he never came to the Redeemer aright.*—Thou art calling this in question, let me ask thee—How was it with thy soul, when thou gavest up thyself to Jesus? Wast thou not humble? Didst thou not come confessing thy sins, lamenting over them; renouncing thy righteousness, thy Dalilahs, and giving thyself up wholly to Jesus? Didst thou make any reserve? Didst thou not take the Redeemer in all his characters, and say, Lord, take my heart, take all I have; not only save me from hell, but sanctify me; do with me, and by me, and in me, what will be most for thy glory? Was not this the case? Let conscience speak, for to that I appeal, and that must give its witness to what I have said. Yea, oh humble Christian, thou didst come aright to Christ. God has given thee saving faith in the Redeemer. Go on with cheerfulness, thou hast most assuredly an interest in Jesus Christ, and heaven will infallibly be thine.

3. *I would address myself to the hypocrite and empty professor upon this question.*—And it is plain that you have no more than a name to live. Your hopes of eternal life are absolutely vain, and you are yet *in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity*. You profess to believe indeed that Jesus is the Saviour, but have you ever savingly closed with him? Did you ever see your nakedness, misery, and poverty, the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and thus come to him for salvation? Were your hearts ever made willing to receive him in all his characters? And have you made a full and unreserved surrender of yourselves to Jesus? Let conscience act but a faithful part, and it will witness against you. To what purpose is it for you to entertain hopes of eternal life then? If you are strangers to Christ, you are in the most awful state, being under the wrath of God. Oh do not deceive yourselves with the expectations of an everlasting inheritance, and yet have no more than a mere form of godliness. Examine yourselves, and you will find you are strangers to that frame that has been described. You know nothing savingly of Jesus Christ, and therefore have no interest in him.

Lastly, *How much they are mistaken who are ready to conclude they have not a work of grace, because they never have felt those legal terrors others have, they never appeared under such degrees of humiliation as many have discovered.*—The Christian is often complaining of an unhumbled soul. He is

afraid he has not seen enough of sin; he begs to have a deeper sense of it. He sees others full of contrition, their hearts deeply impressed with a view of it; but his heart is frozen, dead, and stupid: he cannot mourn as some do; and therefore he fears he has not that real humiliation, which is a necessary evidence of the grace of God. In this thou art greatly mistaken; hast thou seen so much of sin as to fill thee with desires after, and to make thee willing, heartily willing to receive Jesus Christ in all his characters, and cast thy soul upon him? Thy convictions then are saving; thy humiliation is real; and thy state is happy. Ever remember for your direction and satisfaction, the great question is not, whether you have been under such and such legal terrors or not; whether you have discovered such and such degrees of humiliation; but whether you have seen sin in such a light as to make you humbly, willingly, and thankfully accept of the Saviour, and give up yourselves to him. If so, you have been enabled to come aright to Jesus Christ, and have savingly closed with him.

CASE XXVIII.

A person has had a religious education, and cannot remember any time or place, when and where God first wrought upon his soul; what judgment must he form of his state, and what methods must he take to be satisfied that he is a child of God?

THIS is a question that is suitable to the case of many of God's dear children, and what occasions innumerable fears and doubts; sadly breaks in upon the peace of their souls, and leads them into that frame that dishonours God. When the Christian has been hearing a converted sinner representing the time and circumstances of his conversion; how God awakened him to a sense of sin, humbled his proud heart, and brought him to the feet of the Redeemer. When he has been hearing a servant of Christ representing the early discoveries God was pleased to make to him of his wretched condition, and how in the bloom of life he was brought to give himself

up to a dear Saviour; when the Christian hears these and others pointing out most circumstantially the manner of their being brought to Christ, he goes away under great discouragements, and opens his heart in the following manner:—"See, oh my soul, how it has been with others! Hear the account they have to give. Their conversion has been evident to themselves and others; and had I really received the grace of God, should I not remember some of the circumstances of that happy moment? It is true, I have been sober from my youth, and am not chargeable with any gross immoralities; my conversion could not therefore be so visible as that of the open and profane sinner, yet there is a great difference between mere morality and grace; and if a good work is begun in me, whenever it was, the change was great; and must I not remember some of the happy circumstances? Have I not reason to fear, that all my religion is nothing more than the effect of education and example? Will not the instructions of a parent, will not the daily observance of the regular exercises of religion in a family, have a great influence to fill the mind with awe, guard a person against outward immoralities, and be a spur to the discharge of some of the duties of religion, even so much as to appear as a real Christian? And may not this be my case? What reason have I to draw a different conclusion? What must I do in my present painful dilemma? What method must I take to get satisfaction in a point of such vast importance? In fine, what must I call myself? Am I a child of God, or am I only an *almost* Christian,—a Christian by the force of education?" I grant thee, oh timorous soul, something of this is awfully true. A person may be carried to some considerable lengths in the profession of religion through the influence of an education, and especially the daily example and instructions of an affectionate parent, or guardian, whilst they are present; but when they are gone, and temptations begin to present themselves in all their force, the person may throw off all restraint, and no longer appear the Christian. Thus, *Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada; but when he was dead, he fell into idolatry*, 2 Chron. xxiv. 1—17. This is too often the case: the children of godly persons sometimes turn the greatest apostates, and from a strict profession run the greatest lengths in infidelity. These things are often stumbling to the humble Christian, who cannot remember the time and circumstances of his conversion, and he is ready to fear that he is no more than an outward professor, and shall one day absolutely fall,

and make it appear that he never received the grace of God in truth. Having thus then represented thy case, thy doubts and difficulties, I would answer the question in the following manner.

I. *Do not hastily conclude, that thou art a stranger to a work of grace.* It is not enough to make us fear that we are almost Christians, to say we cannot remember the time when God first brought us to Christ, and what methods he took to do it. This will appear, if we consider the three following things.

1. *A remembrance of our conversion, is no mark of grace.* A real mark of grace, is of the same nature with grace itself; therefore there cannot be a mark of grace, but there must be grace itself. For instance, love to Jesus Christ is a mark of grace,—a real, a genuine mark, because it is the very actings of grace itself; or it is that habit of grace implanted in the soul, brought into exercise. Therefore wherever there is love to Christ, it is a certain and undoubted evidence, that a real saving work is begun in such a soul. But it cannot be said so of our remembrance of the circumstances of our conversion. If this was a mark of grace, then those that could not remember their first awakenings and closing with Christ, must conclude they are yet strangers to the grace of God. So that remembrance of conversion, is no real mark of it; for if so, how many thousands must be deemed only outward professors, who give all the real evidences of a saving acquaintance with Jesus Christ? Many are sitting at the right-hand of Jesus, and sweetly singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, who whilst here could never remember the time when God first implanted a principle of spiritual life in their souls. Yea, may I not say there are many of the most eminent of God's saints, who, like stars of the first magnitude, shone with a peculiar lustre, and yet were at a loss in this particular point. Thus, if you are ready to look upon a remembrance of your conversion as necessary to determine you Christians, you are under a great mistake; and this will be a means to fill you with perpetual anxiety, and so unfit you for that cheerful conversation and discharge of duties which is suitable to the Christian character. You have no warrant from Scripture for such a conclusion; but the unhappiness is, *we make marks of grace*, and then examine ourselves by them; and if we find them not, immediately conclude we are no better than hypocrites, though at the same time we have no foundation from the word of God, for such a conclusion.

2. Many are sanctified from the womb, or so early, that they cannot remember when the Spirit first began his work in them.—Jeremiah seems to be such a person, ch. i. 5. *Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee.* Though the word *sanctify* may signify set apart, and that God designed him for the work he afterwards employed him in, yet the other sense may not be excluded. We cannot, we dare not, say it is impossible for God to sanctify a babe; though we cannot comprehend how it can be done, yet all things are possible with God. He can and does do it, else our dying infants must be in melancholy circumstances: they come into the world, destitute of grace, or considered as the children of the first Adam; they have lost the divine image, and this must be restored, that they may be fitted for the everlasting enjoyment of God. And if dying infants are sanctified, why may not living ones? It is equally possible with God, the one as the other. Samuel appears to be one of those that were sanctified so early, 1 Sam. i. 2. and many instances almost every age has produced of children in their most tender years, discovering a love to God, and an esteem for sacred things. And this has been chiefly amongst the children of God's people. He has put an honour upon his saints, and has early fulfilled his promise to their seed. Thus then you may have been early sanctified, yea, so early sanctified, that it is impossible for you to remember the work; and would you conclude yourselves hypocrites, or only almost Christians, because you cannot point out the time of your conversion? Perhaps as far as you can look back, you can remember that your minds were in a great measure under the same impressions they now are; and this seems to be a happy intimation, that God was pleased early to sanctify you, so that you are absolutely incapable of remembering the happy moment. Be not discouraged then, because you cannot speak of your first convictions, and tell how the Spirit brought you to Jesus; nor say that a saving work has never been wrought in you: you would hereby be limiting an infinitely wise and gracious God, and so act unsuitably to the obligations he has laid you under to him.

3. Grace is often insensibly and imperceptibly infused into the hearts of those who have had a religious education. The change is so gradual, or so easy, that it is scarce to be distinguished. The Christian cannot point out the first movings of his heart; he cannot remember any extraordinary impressions.

There is nothing of mount Sinai attending the change; no thunders of the laws; no alarms of conscience. The work is done in a moment; the heart is opened as it were with the turn of a key; a saving change is made, and yet the person perceives it not, but appears the same. Some can as soon lose a sense of their existence, as they can forget that important season, when God suddenly struck them with the most awful convictions, and filled them with all the terrors of Sinai. Their conversion was visible and remarkable, whilst others have been as effectually brought to Jesus, but it has been with the utmost silence; the Spirit came with a still, but powerful voice, called them to the Redeemer, and changed the natural bent of their hearts, and they are not aware of it. No wonder the swearer, the blasphemer, or profane person remembers the particular steps God took with him. But here, one appears the same he ever was. He has been taught to pray from a child, to read the Scriptures, and to attend divine ordinances; he has been all along habituated to good conversation, and he knows not when he first began to relish these sacred things. Saul's conversion was remarkable, Acts ix. but when Samuel's was, whether he was sanctified in infancy, or the work was begun after the dawnings of reason, was difficult for him, and those that knew him, to determine, as he had been always habituated to religious exercises.

It is probable, that those that cannot remember the time of their being brought to God, were wrought upon in their tender years, when, through the unripeness of their judgments, they were incapable of distinguishing what was a real work of grace: the work being then actually begun, gradually and insensibly discovers itself in their after-life, and they often become shining Christians, without being able to give any account of their being brought to the Redeemer.—Thus, oh soul, these considerations are sufficient to guard thee against those rash conclusions thou art sometimes ready to make, that thou art no Christian, because thou canst not remember the time and circumstances of thy conversion. God may have sanctified thee from the womb, or so early and so gradually led thee into a real experience of the divine life, that it is impossible for thee to point it out. Be not discouraged therefore; neither give way to unbelief, because thou art dishonouring God hereby, and mayest provoke him to withhold from thee those sweet tokens of his presence, which would fill thy soul with divine consolation. So much negatively.

II. *Examine yourselves by those things that tend to give you satisfaction in this important matter, and that come within your reach.*—Thus,

1. *Look into what you have experienced.*—That you have had some experience of the things of God in those duties to which you have been inured, I make not the least doubt. It will sufficiently appear upon examination. How has it been with you when approaching God in secret prayer? (For I take it for granted you attend to that.) What has been your frame of soul, the workings of your minds, when under hearing the word? How have you been in meditation, and in the various duties in which you have from time to time been engaged? Have you gone one continued round in a dull and lifeless manner, without having any real sense or experience of the workings of divine grace? Have your natural affections been moved, but not with a sense and real view of spiritual objects? Rather have you not found your souls differently impressed, and in different frames at times? When Jesus has been represented in his various important characters, have you not found sometimes your souls melted in some measure with his love, your hearts filled with desires after him, and with a high esteem of him? When sin has been represented in all its odiousness, our natural depravity, our weakness and great unworthiness, have you not at times been humbled, seen yourselves vile, and been filled with self-abhorrence? Have you not found your hearts filled with hatred of sin; have you not mourned over it, and begged to be delivered from it? Have you not found those hearts, those spiritual evils which all God's people so much complain of, viz. spiritual pride, workings of corruption, and distractions in duty, coldness and formality, &c. And have you not complained of these, and lamented over them before God in secret? Once more, have you not, when in your closets, when none have been witness but God, have you not there sometimes found meltings of soul, when mourning over your sins? Have you not, so far as you know yourselves, given up yourselves to Jesus without reserve, in the most solemn manner, to be justified, sanctified, governed, and saved by him? Have you not found a willingness to be his, viewed and received him as your all, found a subjection of soul to him, renounced all that stood in competition with him? And did you not take him, with his cross, with all his difficulties, and give up yourselves wholly to his conduct and disposal?—Thus look into what you have experienced.

2. *Examine the present state of your soul.*—How is it with

you now? Have you lost all sense of the things of God, or do you still retain the same sentiments of them, and experience the same at times as you did? Examine not whether you find any remains of coldness; be not discouraged, if you find your hearts sometimes seized with a sudden benumbedness: this is the case with all Christians at times. But inquire into the following particulars.

What are your views of sin? Does it appear the same it did? Do you look upon sin in general, or upon any particular sin in a favourable light? Do you secretly hug it in your bosom, and roll it as a sweet morsel under your tongue? Or does it appear full of deformity; and do you find your soul filled with detestation of it, and do you desire to have all the faculties of your mind delivered from it?

What views have you, my friend, of yourself? Are you elated with pride from an apprehension of some peculiar excellencies you are possessed of? Are you puffed up, Pharisee like, because you have not been guilty of public sins as others? Do you think yourself to be something, when you are really nothing? Or do you appear vile and detestable, notwithstanding you are not chargeable with outward immoralities? Are you sensible of the sad depravity of your nature? Are you crying out of the badness, uncleanness, wickedness of your hearts? Do you loathe and abhor yourself, when you take a view of an infinitely Holy God, and of his righteous and holy law? Have you no righteousness to mention before God; but is it all as filthy rags, and as an unclean thing? Do you appear every way unworthy of the divine notice?

What views and thoughts have you of Christ? Did he once appear amiable to you, and does he not now? Or cannot you view him, or think of him with any degree of pleasure? What think you of him as God? Is that an amiable character, and do you see the necessity of it to render him a complete Saviour? How does he appear as *man*, hanging as a sacrifice upon the cross, under all the evidences of divine wrath, and exposed to all the cruelties and reproaches of man? Is he a stumblingblock to you as he was to the Jews, and do you esteem the doctrine of his cross to be full of absurdity? Rather do you not view this mystery of godliness, *God manifested in the flesh*, as the peculiar glory of the Christian religion, and are not you often struck with the love of the great Mediator? How does Christ appear in his various mediatorial characters? Is he all over lovely, as a king as well as a priest? Do you find a willingness to be his subject, to follow him through life,

and to live in his presence above, and to sing his praise for ever? Do you not value the enjoyment of Christ above all sublunary things? Cannot you say (so far as you know your heart,) *Lord, whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee.* Ps. lxxiii. 25. If thou art my portion, I have enough. In fine, is Christ the foundation of your hopes of eternal life? Do you not build your everlasting all upon him, and daily commit your soul to him, to be saved by him?

Again, What is your general conduct? Here remember the inquiry is not to be, whether you have been, or are guilty of any particular slips and falls; as man's state is not to be determined by one or two particular acts, but by the general bent and tendency of his life. Is sin then in general the object of your pursuit? or, are you seeking after a growing conformity to Jesus? Are the commandments of the Lord grievous, or do you see a beauty in every part of God's law, and are you concerned to walk in daily obedience to it? Is holiness your aim, your happiness? Are you watchful over your heart, and against whatever has a tendency to lead you from God?

How are you in your closet? You doubtless find formality and indifference there. But are you not enabled to complain over all done there? Do not you tell God of your corruptions, bewail over your sins, and beg for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace? Do you not find your soul sometimes ashamed before God under a sense of your ingratitude, and melting into godly sorrow? Do not you seem sometimes to be quite disinterested in the surrender of yourself to Jesus, and do not you find in your soul longings after him, and that world where you shall perfectly love, and eternally praise him?

How is it with you in the house of God? Dull and lifeless, I doubt not, too often; your heart is wandering from God, and you appear to be quite insensible. Yet do not you go in general to meet with God? Are you not humbled at your careless attention? Do not you often call upon your wandering heart to return and give attention? Do not you desire to be spiritually affected with what you hear? Do not you mourn when you meet not with Jesus, and is not your soul all life, all zeal and love, all humility and joy, when Jesus gives you his presence, or the Spirit breathes upon your dry bones?

Thus, my dear friend, inquire into the present state and frame of your soul, if you would know what judgment to form of yourself. And further to help you,

3. *Examine what your resolutions are.* Is it your purpose and resolution, through divine grace, to hold on your way, and be faithful unto death? You are sensible of your weakness, but is it your determination in a dependence upon the mighty Redeemer, to continue praying and waiting, and using all the means God has appointed to carry on the work of grace in the heart? You must be apprehensive of many difficulties in the Christian race; and is the prospect discouraging, are you not willing to submit to reproaches, and whatever you may be called to for Christ's sake? You may be afraid of your not enduring to the end; that you shall sink long before you have the haven in prospect; but does not this fear arise from a sense of your weakness, your enemies power and craftiness, and not from any present doubt about your willingness to follow Jesus till death? In fine, do you resolve through grace, to leave yourself in the hands of the Redeemer, together with all your concerns, following him in all duties through the various parts of life, desiring to honour his name, adorn his doctrine, grow into his image, and glorify him both living and dying? Thus these are some of the necessary inquiries to be made, if you would know what conclusion to draw concerning your state.

III. A third direction I would give you is this: *If upon examination you have reason to hope your heart can give some satisfactory answer to the above questions, draw a favourable conclusion concerning your state, admire the grace of God in giving you a real experience of the Spirit's work, and go on your way rejoicing.* I doubt not your being able through grace to answer the above inquiries. Methinks I see you, in your retired moments, looking over these various heads of examination, and hear you breaking out in some such manner as this—"Tis true, oh my soul, I cannot remember the time and circumstances of my conversion; but have I had no experience of the operations of the Spirit on my heart in duties and ordinances? See, have I not been at times melted, raised, quickened, and humbled? And what is it that has moved me? Was it not a view of my sins, my ingratitude; a view of the love of Jesus, or some spiritual truth brought home to my heart? And have I not, if my heart does not deceive me, chosen Jesus for my Saviour, his gospel for my rule, his people for my companions, and his salvation for my best portion? And how is it with me now? Am I grown weary of the ways of God? Dost thou repent, oh my soul, thy choice of Jesus? Is he not still amiable? What mean those secret longings

after him, that concern to honour him, that fear of offending him? Are not these tokens of love? Oh does he not appear precious in all his characters? I cannot do without him; I must have an interest in him. How is it, oh my soul, as to sin? Dost thou really love it? Why then dost thou secretly mourn over it? Why desire to be diverted from it? Why art thou filled with self-abhorrence? Why appearest thou so vile? Does not this bespeak a hatred of sin, and some real humility? In fine, tell me, oh my soul, what is the foundation of thy hopes of eternal life? Is it not Christ? Dost thou not desire to be made holy? to take Christ as king, as well as priest? What is thy purpose and resolution? Is it not through grace to cleave to Christ, in faith and humble obedience, till death? Dost thou deceive me, oh my wicked heart, in these important affairs? Am I mistaken? Sure I am not. I hope I find it as I have represented."

Thus, oh humble soul, I am persuaded it is with thee: and surely this is an evidence of grace. What can I call thee but a Christian? What canst thou conclude thou art but a child of God? Was it ever known in any age of the world, that a good education taught a person really to hate sin and love Jesus Christ? Can any thing short of the influences of the Spirit conquer the enmity of our hearts, and make us willing to submit to, and close in with the Redeemer? Was it ever known that a hypocrite could heartily join with the Apostle, and adopt his language in the seventh chapter to the Romans? But is not this thy case? What canst thou then be but a Christian indeed? Hatred of, and desire of deliverance from, all sin, even heart-sins, and love to our Lord Jesus Christ, will remain, as long as the world continues, standing and incontestable evidences of an interest in Jesus, and an acquaintance with him. Canst thou not remember when God made the change? Let not that discourage thee: it is of no great importance. Rejoice that thine eyes are opened, and maintain and keep up a prevailing hope of spiritual and eternal blessings. Let not others experiences stagger thee, oh humble soul; but rejoice in, and adore the infinite grace of God to thee. Be often viewing with admiration, the grace of God in giving thee a religious education, and impressing thy mind with so early a sense of divine things; and be often reasoning with thyself in some such manner as this:—"Why should I question my experience of the grace of God, oh my soul, because I cannot point out the time when the change was made? Sure I will not give up my hopes. What though I cannot call to mind

the happy moment when God sent his Spirit into my heart, may I not be a real Christian for all this? To deny it, would be to limit the grace and power of God, to dictate to infinite wisdom; to run myself into difficulties, to lay a foundation for continual uneasiness, and to unfit myself for the cheerful discharge of those various duties which are incumbent upon me. Let me therefore rejoice in the Lord, and not let go my confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. I hope I love Jesus; I would love him more; and can I love him and not be a Christian? *Oh return unto thy rest, oh my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*—Thus go on thy way rejoicing. I would give one direction more.

IV. *If you cannot receive satisfaction from any of the above inquiries, but are still in the dark, then come and throw yourselves at the feet of Jesus, leave your souls with him, and rest upon him for salvation.*—We may examine ourselves at some seasons without any advantage. Our souls being in the dark, we may not be able to see any thing in us that looks like the work of God; or we may be afraid of drawing a wrong conclusion. Is this the case with thee, oh soul? Hast thou examined thyself, and canst thou not receive that satisfaction which thou wouldst desire? Art thou still dubious about thy real character? Do not be discouraged; but go to Jesus, and throw thyself at his feet as a naked, guilty sinner. Commit thy soul into his hands, and determine to rest there. Say—“Lord, I dare not conclude I am a child of God; but I would come to thee; I see no other refuge but thee. I am lost, if thou takest me not under thy wing; oh here I am a guilty, polluted, unworthy creature, pardon me, sanctify, cleanse me. I dare not say I have believed in thee; but if I have been acting the hypocrite, yet, Lord, I would venture to come; I am within that gracious promise, which is a promise of thine own, John vi. 37. *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* Lord, I would lie at thy feet; I would rest entirely upon thee, and leave myself with thee, to be disposed of as shall seem most convenient to thee.”

This is a noble resolution, a noble act of faith; when the soul is in doubt about his state, under distressing fears, to go and throw himself upon Jesus, and say, Lord, here will I lie at thy feet; if I perish, I will perish there.—Oh timorous soul, go thou and do likewise. This honours Christ, is a means of bringing peace to the soul, and fits for the discharge of duty. If this is thy resolution, it is a sign thou hast received the grace of God in truth; take it as a token for good, that thou art a

child of God: go on, therefore, trusting and waiting, and in God's own time, when he sees it most for his glory, he will arise and shine upon his work in thy heart, and give thee *the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father.*

Thus I have feebly attempted to answer thy case, oh humble soul, and direct thee what to do under the various difficulties that surround thee.—I shall now close with two or three reflections.

1. *Hence we learn, how unsuitably we act, when we make our own or others' experience a standard.*—One has been brought early to Christ, and he is uneasy because his conversion is not so visible as that of others. Another has been brought to Jesus, at an advanced age; he is afraid the work is not right, or that he shall never meet with acceptance, because he was not enabled to give himself up to his Redeemer in youth. Some have been under great terrors, awful awakenings at conversion: these are ready to expect that others should meet with the same; or else they question the reality of a work of grace, because their souls were not melted down with the love of Christ. Others have been drawn by love; the doctrines of divine grace have like dew gently fallen upon their souls, and been made effectual to produce a saving change without any inward terror. These are afraid the work is not right, because they have been strangers to striking convictions of sin, &c.—Thus each in his turn is uneasy; and for confining an infinitely gracious God to a particular method in beginning and carrying on his work in the soul. How unjustifiable is this conduct, as well as weak and ungrateful? Shall he not take what method he pleases? and can he not as effectually do it by one as by another? However the work is done, rejoice that you are brought to Jesus, and do not set up your own experience as a standard for others, or another's as a standard for you.

2. *In our examination of ourselves, we should not lay such a stress upon the time and circumstances of our conversion, but examine ourselves by the real marks and evidences of grace.*—It is happy, indeed, if we can remember the time of our espousals, and view the various steps of our conversion, but all cannot do it. The surest way is to examine ourselves by the marks of grace. And here we should confine ourselves to those that are true Scripture marks, and not make marks of our own, which are really no marks, and so be led into dangerous mistakes.

3. *How awful is it, if there are any of us, who have not yet been savingly brought to Christ!*—Awful is thy case, oh formal

hypocrite, whatever thy hopes are of an eternal world ; thou art resting upon an outward profession, and art destitute of all saving grace. Awful is your case, ye children of God's people, who are enemies to Jesus Christ, and have not yet felt an almighty power changing your hearts, and bringing you to an obedience to the Redeemer. Your privileges will rise up against you at the Judgment, and aggravate your misery, unless you close with Jesus.—But doubly awful is your case, you who have almost spent your days, and yet can give no evidences of a work of grace in your hearts ! You are just come to the end of your race, and yet strangers to Christ ! A few days may put a period to your existence here, and yet no real concern for your souls !—Oh that the Spirit of God may lead us all effectually to Jesus Christ, that we may believe on him to the everlasting salvation of our souls !

CASE XXIX.

A young person who has had a religious education, and gave his parents promising hope of a work of grace in his heart, and after this, threw aside all his religion, and gave himself over to many known sins, but has of late been enabled to refrain from those sins, thinks he hates sin as sin, and attends constantly with delight on, public worship, prayer, reading, meditation, &c. desires to know whether this is restraining grace only, or saving grace ; and begs advice and instruction in a matter of so great importance.

OF all things, those that relate to our everlasting happiness are of the greatest moment, lie with the greatest weight upon the mind, and fill the awakened humble soul either with a painful anxiety or a divine satisfaction, according to the frame he is in, or the point of view in which they appear to him. No wonder we find a soul so solicitous after salvation, or so parti-

cularly concerned to know whether what he has experienced is the work of the Spirit. His everlasting all is at stake, and he cannot but be anxious to know whether it is secure. He has a deep sense of the worth of his immortal soul, of the awfulness of a mistake as to its vast concerns, and cannot therefore be satisfied, till he has some reason to hope he has an interest in Jesus, and a real acquaintance with the divine life.

This I apprehend to be your case, my dear young friend, who have sent in the above question. You once gave your affectionate parents great hopes of your future appearance. Your tender mind seemed to be under some particular impressions concerning the excellency and importance of religion. You attended in some measure to the instructions of your fond indulgent parents, who were rejoicing at the amiable prospect that appeared of your serious spirit, and admiring perhaps divine grace, for this important addition to their happiness. Had God cut you off in those early days, how cheerfully would your friends have submitted to the stroke, and followed you to the grave without one single doubt of your everlasting felicity. But see the uncertainty of all earthly dependencies; whilst they are taking the satisfaction arising from such a view of things, behold a sudden alteration appears in the temper and conduct of their beloved son, damps their joys at once, and darkens every agreeable prospect. Something or other turns up to give a turn to his mind. He quits his character as a Christian, and commences that of an apostate. He stifles all his convictions, he gives a loose to every criminal inclination; his corruptions begin now in good earnest to rise in his heart, destroy all the effects of a good education, and the unhappy youth is hurried with the utmost impetuosity from one act of sin to another, without so much as thinking what the consequences will be. Was not this in some measure the case with you, my friend? Methinks I see you eager to get rid of every religious impression, and drowning all thoughts of a future world by the intoxicating pleasures of sin. Satan now takes every method he can to secure you in his possession. Fearing lest the chains are not strong enough by which you are held, he labours to add strength to them. He prompts you to desert all your first principles, teaches you to think slightly of every important duty in religion, stirs up in you inclinations to sinful enjoyments, and persuades you, that they alone can give you the truest happiness.

Thus you are bidding a farewell to God and a religious life,

and hastening on to the regions of everlasting destruction; when behold! the kind Mediator, who I hope enrolled your name amongst his people's in the book of life, sees you, steps in to your relief, saves you from everlasting ruin, and says, "Father, this is a chosen vessel, behold his name in the everlasting roll, see it in the sacred records of eternity; I have purchased him with my own blood; say therefore unto him, *Live.*" The command, the ever-glorious command is given; and see the spirit comes, sets the broad seal of heaven upon thee, turns the strong man armed out of his possession, and brings thee out of thy dreadful captivity!

And what is now the consequence? Thou art struck with admiration: the new creature begins to move, thou art no longer a chained captive, the triumph of Satan. The union is broke between sin and thy heart, and it no longer appears the charming object it once did. Now thou art humbled, filled with self-abhorrence, with hatred of all thy sins, and beginnest to find a relish for those duties thou wast brought up to, but hast sadly neglected. Now salvation is thy grand concern; eternity appears full of importance; thy soul a jewel of unspeakable value, and what wouldst thou not give for an interest in the Redeemer? But now things look dark; nothing so desirable as being a Christian indeed; but thou art afraid this is not thy happy case. Thou lookest back to the time when thy parents entertained hopes of thee, but thou hast sadly fallen since, and now art afraid the present alteration is only owing to restraining grace; that it is only some revival of early convictions, and that thou shalt again fall into a course of sin, and make it appear that thou art an absolute stranger to the grace of God. I doubt not but all the circumstances of thy early hopes, and of thy sad apostacy, crowd into thy mind, and greatly discourage thee from entertaining the happy thought that God has now begun a saving work in thy soul. Thou art giving some comfortable evidences of such a work in a hatred of sin, and a relish for, and delight in, the great duties of religion, but thou art afraid to look upon these as evidences in thee; afraid lest thy heart should again deceive thee. Oh couldst thou but be satisfied that thou art a newborn creature, what an ease would it be to thy burdened mind! How would thy soul rejoice and exult, and admire the grace that made the change! But alas, this is a matter in dispute: therefore thou art desirous of knowing what judgment thou must form of things in their present situation, and what methods thou must pursue to get satisfaction.

This, I apprehend, my dear young friend, is thy case in general. And now with the tenderness and affection of a brother, and the faithfulness of a minister, I would attempt to answer it.—And here are three things which lay upon your mind, and which make up the difficulties in your case.

I. *You are discouraged from a view of your early profession and your apostacy, lest your present change should not be saving.*

II. *You want to know whether a hatred of sin, or a delight in the duties of religion, are the effects of restraining or renewing grace.—And,*

III. *Upon determining these points, you would know what is your duty.—I would attend to each of these.*

I. *Let us consider the discouragement that arises from a view of your early profession and your apostacy, lest your present change should not be saving.*—Now how does your mind work upon this view? Do not things appear to you in some such light as this, and are you not led to reason in the following manner?—"See, oh my soul, I once made a flourishing profession. My parents began to hope I was really renewed. I was had in some peculiar esteem, and had the reputation of a Christian. But, alas! I soon apostatized, and became a mere withered branch. I run into many known sins, stifled conscience, and deserted all my first principles, and made it fully appear that my heart had never been established with the grace of God. All my early religion, even that which gave my dear parents such encouraging hopes of me, was nothing more than the mere effect of education; and did I deceive my friends and myself then with a mere name, an empty show; and may I not be doing the same now? Is not such an apostacy a plain intimation to me, that I must not believe the most flourishing appearances again? May not my present profession only be a sudden fit of zeal, occasioned by the remonstrances of conscience, which will soon be suppressed, and so my goodness appear but as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which soon passeth away? Can I reasonably expect, that after such a flagrant apostacy, after stifling so many clear convictions, flying in the face of so much goodness, and abusing so many important privileges, that God would send his spirit into my heart, conquer my enmity, and bring me effectually to Jesus? Is it not the greatest presumption in me to look upon any present appearance of religion as a real work of grace? For would God ever look favourably upon such a wicked apostate, such a vile ungrateful wretch as I am? Had I not been

favoured with a religious education; had I not made so strict a profession, my sins would not have been attended with such aggravating circumstances. But I was a child of many prayers; saw daily a good example; received daily good instructions; found in some measure the influence of them, and entered apparently into the service of the Redeemer. And behold now I have since fallen, and have I any encouragement to hope then that God will visit my soul in mercy, and give me his salvation?"

Such as these perhaps are some of your present thoughts, my dear young friend; and so every thing looks dark and discouraging around you, arising from a view of your former apostacy.—Permit me to ask you a few questions, and to offer you a few hints that may be a means of setting you right in this important affair. And do you apprehend God cannot, or that he will not, bring such an apostate to himself? You cannot, I am persuaded, believe that he is not able to begin a real work of grace in your heart. For what is it Omnipotence is not able to do? Has he never brought such a rebel as you to the feet of Jesus? has he never melted such a heart as yours? What was Ephraim? He was favoured with a variety of privileges, but he abused them all, and went on frowardly in the way of his heart; God afflicted him; but he was like *a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*, that kicked and flung, and could not tell how to brook the rod; yet sovereign, almighty grace turns his heart, melts his soul into godly sorrow, and he falls down at the footstool of God, smites upon his thigh, and sadly laments the sins of his youth, Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. Thus can God bring you, my friend, to the Redeemer, however you have endeavoured to harden your heart against him. The religious appearance you once made, therefore, and the hopes you gave of a real work of grace, together with your sad apostacy; is no reason why your present convictions should not be saving, or why the work in your heart should not be real; therefore let not this discourage your mind. But you will say perhaps, your fears are, that God *will not* come and quicken you after such affronts offered him, after such ingratitude. You have such a sense of your vileness, that you dare not think he will manifest himself to such a wretch, and that therefore your present convictions will again wear off, and leave you as great a stranger to God as you were before.—But remember, my friend, God does not think as we, nor does he act as we do, Isa. lv. 8, 9. Was he not to save the vile and the unworthy, he must save none. For though all are not

public sinners, yet even those that appear the most amiable to our eyes on account of a regular uniform obedience, appear more detestable in their own eyes, are ready to style themselves the chief of sinners, and adore infinite free grace in their salvation. Consider for your encouragement, God cannot only pardon, but he can *abundantly pardon*, Isa. lv. 7. He made it abundantly evident in the conversion and salvation of Saul the Pharisee; who was a public enemy to Christ, an open blasphemer, a cruel persecutor of the churches, yet he obtained mercy, *that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ might appear exceeding abundant*, 1 Tim. i. 13, 14. Some of the Corinthians were ranked amongst the chief of sinners, such as *whoremongers, adulterers, idolaters, drunkards, thieves, covetous*, &c. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. and all this to discover the riches of the grace of God, and to show the encouragement that all sorts of sinners have to hope for pardon. There is abundance of grace in God to pass by innumerable sins, and there is an infinitely glorious righteousness in Jesus Christ to entitle the chief of sinners to eternal life. God's end in the salvation of sinners, is to glorify his grace; and this grace therefore triumphs over the greatest unworthiness. Are you afraid you are too great a sinner for God to save? Oh, make the trial. Put all your sins in one scale, and all the riches of divine grace in the other, and see which will overbalance. If you were to be saved by works, you would have reason to fear your ever reaching the everlasting mansions; but as you are to be saved entirely by grace, remember, grace will stick at nothing to glorify itself! The more unworthy you are, the more glory will redound to divine grace in the salvation of so guilty a creature?

Thus you have no reason to be discouraged, or to conclude that you have not now felt the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, because you once made a profession, but fell away. Many have stifled conviction after conviction, acted contrary to conscience, and every tie and engagement, and yet have at length been made the triumph of sovereign distinguishing grace. You are not so much concerned about what you have been, but what you are now, to inquire into the present work of God upon you, and examine whether you can give any evidences of its being saving or not.—And this leads me,

II. To consider, *Whether a hatred of sin as sin, and a delight in the duties of religion, such as hearing, reading, prayer, meditation, &c. are the effects of restraining or renewing grace.*—Through restraining grace, or through the restraints God has put upon the mind, by the influence of an education, or by the

force of some convictions, a person may abstain from gross immoralities, and make some figure in the externals of religion: nay, he may be brought in some measure to detest the one, and be pleased with the other.—Thus, when Elisha told Hazael of the evil he would bring upon the children of Israel; *that their strong holds he would set on fire, their young men he would slay with the sword, and would dash their children, and rip up their women with child*, he said with a sort of resentment, *What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* 2 Kings viii. 12, 13. Dost thou divest me of humanity, and make me appear as cruel and despicable as a brute beast, to imagine that I should be guilty of such detestable things.

When children have heard their parents representing the odiousness of such and such sins, they may be prevailed upon to look upon them as abominable, and even after, to be guilty of them. So through being habituated to a course of duty, an unrenewed person may, with an apparent pleasure attend, may hear, may read, may pray, and like the stony ground hearers, be sometimes filled with joy through the working of his natural affection. But all this comes far short of your experience, my young friend.—For,

1. *You hate sin, as sin.*—Now what does this signify? It supposes, that you have not only seen the dreadful nature and destructive tendency of sin, but that you have seen its obliquity; that it carries in it the greatest inconformity to the divine nature, and consequently deprives the soul of its greatest beauty, and sets it at the greatest distance from God, the fountain of all excellency; that it carries in it the greatest ingratitude to God, whose goodness it highly abuses; that it unfits you for the great duties of religion, and has introduced into your soul, the most hateful deformity. Having these views of it, you find it appear odious; your soul is filled with a detestation of it. You mourn over it; it appears burdensome to you; you cannot willingly indulge it as before; but you pray against it, are ashamed before God that you have been so guilty of that which is so dishonourable and so hateful to him, and you desire above all things to be delivered from it. Is not this really the case, my friend? Are these the views you have of sin? These the workings of your mind upon it? Are you not filled with self-abhorrence on the account of sin's dwelling in you? Are you not filled with shame, at a view of your duties, because of sin's cleaving to them? Does not your heart appear loathsome because of sin? In fine, are you not

vile and despicable in your own eyes, because sin has so much defiled you? Then you hate sin as sin, you hate sin really with all your heart; and what clearer evidence can you have of renewing grace than this? Is it possible for the force of convictions, or of education, to give you a real hatred of sin? Terrors may make the person resolve he will leave sin, and education may make a person believe that sin is odious; but he can never hate it, till he sees its odiousness by the light of the Spirit. When the Spirit takes possession of the heart, therefore he leads the soul to a view of sin, so that he is covered with shame and confusion, and bursts into tears of ingenuous sorrow. Fear arises from a sense of guilt; shame from a view of the deformity of sin. There may be the first, and no work of grace in the heart; but the latter is the evidence of grace, and necessarily supposes the implantation of it in the soul. Thus then, my young friend, I cannot but conclude, as you thus view, are ashamed of, and hate sin, that you are a new-born soul, have passed from death unto life, and are a Christian indeed. Did not Joseph give a full evidence of his real love to God, when under that strong temptation to adultery from Potiphar's wife, he said, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Gen. xxxix. 9. He did not hate the sin because it might expose him to the contempt of man, but because it was levelled against God; therefore he dare not, he cannot indulge it. Can I be so ungrateful to that God, whose goodness and mercy have so remarkably followed me? Can I act so inconsistent with my profession of, and my relation to him? God forbid. I cannot be guilty of such base ingratitude. How clear an evidence was this of his real love to God, and interest in him?—Thus when the Apostle Paul complained of sin, mourned over it, and desired to be delivered from it, he gave an undoubted evidence of his having received the grace of God, Rom. vii. And thus your hating sin, as sin, my dear friend, cannot be the effect of restraining, but of renewing, and converting grace.—But,

2. *You take delight in attending upon public worship, reading, meditation, prayer, &c.*—Wherever the grace of God is implanted, it teaches persons not only to hate sin, but to love holiness, and to pursue those means which have a peculiar tendency to make us holy. Persons indeed may attend regularly upon public worship, may read the scriptures, may pray, &c. and yet be absolute strangers to the power of religion: but when there is a delight in, and a relish for these duties, it is an evidence of a saving change. And is this your case, my

young friend? Have you any delight in these duties, any relish for them? Have you found your heart at times melted in them, through a view of spiritual truths? Has God met you, and communed with you? Have public ordinances been at times effectual to quicken your slothful soul, to warm you with desires after spiritual things? Have you found the word and ate it, and has it been the joy and rejoicing of your soul? Have you in reading the word found any quickenings, any truth set home to humble, convince, or enliven you? Has any part of the word been opened to you, and afforded you new light in your head, and life in your heart? Have you in prayer at times found your soul possessed with some suitable sense of the perfections of God, humbled under a sense of sin, and stirred up with holy relentings, to plead with the penitent publican, *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner?* Have you found your soul set at liberty, brought even to God's seat, your mouth filled with arguments, and you enabled to plead and wrestle with him for spiritual blessings? Have you found the Spirit breathing upon your dry bones, melting your hard heart, and filling you with holy affection? Have you in meditation at times been raised with a view of spiritual objects, been humbled, comforted, and quickened, got your affections in some measure disentangled from present enjoyments, and been enabled to view all sublunary things with a becoming indifference? All this cannot but give you a relish for these sacred duties, and fill you with uneasiness when you find it not thus with you. I doubt not but you are dull enough at times; it is not always that you find your affections raised, and your soul in this sweet, this delightful frame; you are often in the dark, and left in a great measure to a dull and lifeless frame. But this is matter of deep concern. This does not take off your relish for these important duties; you still prize them, make choice of them, or engage in them voluntarily, and desire to meet God in them. What can this then be but the effect of the grace of God in you? Time was when you could not bear to attend upon these duties; or else you attended in the most careless manner, and had not the glory of God and your everlasting interest in view?

But now what draws you to the house of God? What prevails upon you to pray, to read, to meditate? Is it not an experience of the presence of God in these duties, a relish for them, a desire after meeting with God in them? This then speaks you a Christian indeed. Was it not an evidence of David's being an Israelite indeed, when he longed after the

ordinances of God in his state of exile, and cried out, *When shall I come and appear before God?* Ps. xlii. 1, 2. Is not a good man set forth by having his *delight in the law of the Lord, and meditating upon it day and night*, Ps. i. 2. Was it not brought in as an evidence of Saul's conversion, *that he prayed?* Acts ix. 11.

Thus then upon the whole it appears, my friend, that you have experienced an almighty power changing your heart. Restraining grace might produce a considerable reformation in you, custom and education might make you look upon some sins with a sort of detestation; but what can make you hate sin, as sin, but the special grace of God? This hatred of sin shows, that the union is dissolved between sin and the heart, that the reign of sin is destroyed in the soul, the captive set at liberty, and the divine life begun. What can make a soul delight in spiritual duties, but the special grace of God? Read, hear, and pray you might, and not be a Christian; but to delight in these, to have a relish for them, is an evidence that the finger of God has been at work in the soul, and has implanted a real principle of spiritual life.—I now come to consider your last request, which is,

III. *To intimate to you what is your duty, or to give you some instruction suitable to your case.*—And,

1. *Believe the change, and admire the infinite riches of divine grace manifested therein.*—Do not encourage a doubting temper; that will bring no glory to God, nor peace to your own soul. But believe the work God has done for and in you, and consider and adore the grace that said unto you, *Live*. I would suggest some such hints as these for you frequently to attend to, viz. “See, oh my soul, what God has done for thee. Oh what hadst thou been doing now, if a gracious covenant God had not stopped thee? What would have been thy portion? Oh stand and view the grace, the abundance of grace thou hast received, and be filled with admiration! When I look back upon my apostacy, and consider how eager to stifle every conviction; what ingratitude I was guilty of; whither I was going with hasty speed, and where I should soon have been, if God had left me; oh, I tremble, I shudder! Oh the rich grace of God! What, stop such a daring rebel! hold out the golden sceptre to him! What, pardon such a guilty, ungrateful creature, melt his hard heart, and bring him to a dear Saviour; who can point out the grace! Oh, may I ever admire the free love, the infinite pity of God, and long for that world, where my everlasting song will be *Grace, grace!*”

2. *Rejoice that as God has begun a good work in you, so he will carry it on to perfection.*—Before, you had only an appearance of a work of God in you; you therefore soon fell in with the temptations that were offered. But now a real work is begun, and therefore you shall be kept by *the mighty power of God, through faith unto salvation*. Remember what your securities are;—the oath and promise of the Father, the mediation of the Son, and the presence of the Almighty Spirit. Oh be often viewing these things, as it will be of peculiar service to your soul, in animating you with zeal and resolution, in quickening you to duty, and in encouraging you with the hopes of perseverance in the midst of the most threatening difficulties.—When you stumble, up and be pressing on towards the mark, for the prize is secured. Fear not, *for no weapon formed against you shall prosper*; you are not of them that *draw back unto perdition*, but of them that *believe unto the saving of the soul*.

3. *Be not self-confident, but entertain a godly jealousy over your heart, and watch against the first appearance of backslidings.*—Whilst you are rejoicing in what God has done for you, take care that your heart is not filled with pride; neither growing secure and careless. Though you are safe, so as not totally to fall from grace, yet you may fall so as to dishonour God, and darken your evidences of an interest in Jesus, and wound your soul. Peter was too self-sufficient, therefore he fell into an open abomination. I would advise you to attend to the exhortation of the Psalmist, Ps. ii. 11. *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling*. Do not be afraid, yet do not be secure, nor full of self. Watch against whatever has a tendency to lead you aside; the more self-confident you are, the more you are in danger of falling; the more diffident of self, and the more you honour God, the more you are secured from falling into sin.—Oh, ever remember, that though through grace, sin cannot destroy you, yet it may greatly weaken and wound you.

4. *Walk worthy of that vocation wherewith you are called.* I am certain you cannot, you will not conclude from what has been said, that you have liberty to sin, that your state is safe, and therefore you will indulge yourself in every outward pleasure.—He that draws such a conclusion from the doctrines of divine grace, or from an apprehension of the grace of God to his soul, cannot be a Christian; at least he acts not like one. O my friend, if you have a suitable sense of what God has done for you, you will be saying, *O what shall I render unto*

the Lord for all his goodness? How shall I honour God? Oh be not cold in his service, oh my soul! let it be my great concern to make the glory of God my aim, and let this be my motto, For me to live is Christ.

Thus be concerned to walk, so as that you may honour God: let your conversation be suitable to that profession you make; be concerned that your graces be in a flourishing condition, and that your daily walk is becoming the gospel of Christ, that so you may have growing evidences of a real change in your heart, and may be rejoicing in the prospect of that glorious world, where you shall clearly see the footsteps of divine providence, and grace to you, in bringing you to Jesus, and triumph in God as your everlasting portion. I shall now close all with one remark.

Hence we learn, *The greatest sinners have encouragement to come to Jesus and to hope for salvation.*—Have you stifled one conviction after another? Have you made a profession, bound yourselves by solemn vows to be the Lord's, made numberless resolutions, and broke them all, and turned again to folly? Yet are you *now* sensible of *sin*? You have encouragement to come to the Redeemer, and hope for acceptance. Here is a young person that once made some appearance of religion, and afterwards stifled every conviction, run into many known sins, and was taking all methods to harden his heart against God; yet see, the grace of God has melted his heart; he now hates sin, and gives a comfortable evidence of his having experienced a saving change in his soul.

O let this encourage you, ye children of believing parents who have wandered into the ways of sin, let this encourage you to come to Jesus, and plead free grace and the blood of Christ. Whoever you are, let not secret despair keep you at a distance from the Redeemer. Hear what the gospel proclamation is, Isa. lv. 1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.*—Our Lord himself, in that general promise, John vi. 37. encourages all that come to him with the hopes of salvation, *And him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.*—Art thou thirsty? Art thou willing to come to Christ? Thy willingness to come, is an evidence of his willingness to receive and save thee. It is he that has made thee willing to come to him; and for what purpose, but that he may exalt the riches of his grace in thy salvation.—Let none then despair of pardon, that are desirous of leaving sin, and of coming to Jesus.

CASE XXX.

What judgment must a person form of his state, or what must he do, who is in total darkness, and cannot see any thing of a work of grace in his heart?

WHAT a difference is there between the hypocrite and the real believer? The one is always full of self-flattery, entertaining the kindest thoughts of his state; the other is writing bitter things against himself, ever humble, and afraid lest to entertain a hope of an interest in Jesus would be esteemed presumption. He appears so unworthy in his own eyes, so vile and despicable, that he dares not draw a favourable conclusion concerning himself; but as he knows he has deserved the everlasting indignation of a just and holy God; so he is ready to fear that will be his awful portion, notwithstanding all the promises of divine grace, and all the encouragements the gospel exhibits to the greatest sinners. He can see no amiableness in himself, nothing to give him any hopes he is a child of God, but a thick cloud hangs over his soul, hides the sun of righteousness from his view, and all is dark within. This is not always the case with the believer; but when it is, it is peculiarly melancholy. He has no joy or peace in believing; he is full of doubts and fears, is surrounded with darkness, and is under the most fearful apprehensions of sin and wrath.

This appears to be your case, my friend, according to the account you have sent in. Distressed as it is, perhaps, many here can join with you, and say they feel, they fear, the same you do. In addressing one therefore, I address you all; and may the Spirit accompany what may be said, with his almighty power, that it may be made effectual to still your minds under all discouragements, and to lead you to a cheerful dependence upon Jesus Christ for all the blessings of salvation.

That I may answer this question in a manner that may be in some respects suitable, I would,

I. *Take all the complaints represented in this person's case, and show their consistency with our being Christians; or, that a total darkness and great fears about our spiritual state, lay no just foundation for us to conclude that we are not Christians*

indeed.—If it can be made appear from scripture and experience, that these are the complaints of God's own people, then we have no reason to conclude that our state is bad, unless we bear the real marks and characters of an unrenewed soul.

Let us then view the case in all its particulars.—And we find here a complaint of violent and sore temptations.—But it is plain this is no ways inconsistent with an interest in Christ, because Christ himself was tempted. The devil tempted him in the wilderness to distrust, presumption, &c. Matt. iv. 3. &c. And when the awful hour of his sufferings approached, the prince of this world again attacked him, and made his last furious onset upon him, John xiv. 30. 'Thus our Lord likewise tells Peter, that *Satan had desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat*, Luke xxii. 31. The words seem to be expressive of sore temptations.

The Apostle Paul, though so great a Christian, and distinguished with such high enjoyment, yet had a *messenger of Satan sent to buffet him*, 2 Cor. xii. 7.—Thus temptations are consistent with grace; for always observe, it is not our sin for the most blasphemous things, to be offered to our minds by Satan; we are no further chargeable with temptations, than we encourage and fall in with them.

Again, *Another circumstance our friends bring in as unfavourable is the frowns of providence.*—This has been a common case with God's people. They have met with various disappointments as to this world, have lost their outward enjoyments, and have been under afflictive dispensations. Thus it was with Job, with David, and with many others. Nay, the Apostles tell us, *that it is through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom of heaven*, Acts xiv. 22. So that whatever afflictions we may be exercised with in the present state, they lay no just foundation for us to suspect or conclude that we are not real Christians.

Again, *We find in this case want of assurance, and fears of being cast away:* and these only are consistent with grace, because we find them in God's people. Thus the Psalmist cries out, Ps. lxxvii. 7. *under awful fears that God had left him, Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* His unbelieving heart seems to lead him to suspect the faithfulness, unchangeableness, and mercy of God. Thus the church in captivity is represented as drawing a sad conclusion that God had left her,

Isa. xlix. 14, 15. God addresses the timorous and doubting, Isa. xli. 10. *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right-hand of my righteousness.* Here is plainly a want of assurance: and here are fears supposed to arise in the soul that God is not our God, and yet God says, *I am thy God*: from whence we conclude, that this complaint is not inconsistent with an experience of divine grace in the heart.

Again, *The person that sent in the above case complains of being under the hidings of God's face, and appears to be in great darkness of soul.* But even this is a case that has been common to God's people. Thus Job inquires wherefore God hid his face from him, Job xiii. 24. David represents God as hiding himself in times of trouble, Ps. x. 1. and Ps. xxx. 7. he speaks of God's hiding his face, and his soul being therefore troubled. Nay, the prophet goes still further, Isa. l. 10. and says, that *walking in darkness and having no light*, is consistent with our interest in a covenant God; therefore he exhorts such to *trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay upon their God.* If we examine the experiences of believers, we shall find this to be frequently the case. God has hid his face; their souls are in great darkness; they can see no traces of the divine image in their souls; but a shade is drawn over all the work of God. Were we to conclude, because this is the case with us, that we were but nominal Christians, how small would be the number of real ones; and how unfavourably must we think of those, who, notwithstanding this, give the clearest evidences of their experience of the grace of God.

Again, *Another complaint is fears of death, and distressing views of hell.* This was the very case with the Psalmist, as he expresses it, Ps. cxvi. 3. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.* How frequent is it to find the Christian alarmed at the views of death, and afraid of falling into the hands of an angry God? It requires strong faith to triumph over death, or even to calm the soul under the views of it; especially when the Christian has a deep sense of his guilt and unworthiness. It cannot then be an evidence of our having no grace when we are under fears of death, and under any melancholy apprehensions of the bottomless pit. Your case my friend, is not singular, for many, even of eminent saints, have felt the same, who are now standing in the presence of God as conquerors through him that loved them.

Again, *Our friend represents many scriptures brought to his mind which are discouraging.*—Such as these, *What will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your soul?* Matt. xvi. 26. and Heb. ii. 3. *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* This is a case very frequent amongst the children of God: when Satan has any design to execute, or any temptation to offer, he knows how to apply scripture itself. Thus when he tempted our Lord to presumption, to give the temptation the greater force, he quotes scripture, saying, *For it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone,* Matt. iv. 6. Thus when he has a design of distressing the Christian, he will perhaps offer a text of scripture to the mind, to fill the soul with awful fears, and, if possible, to lead him to despair.—This complaint, therefore, lays no foundation for us to conclude that we are strangers to the grace of God.

Lastly, *Another dark circumstance is, that our friend has no answers to prayer.*—This has been the complaint of others. They have prayed and waited, and God has not satisfied their desires. The woman of Canaan seemed to be put off at first: our Lord answered her not a word. When his disciples entreated for her, he appeared to cast contempt upon her, though at last he gave her the blessing, Matt. xv. 22, &c.—Here we must observe, that God does not always answer the prayers of his people in the very particulars they seek to him about. Yet he may answer them, and does do it, by giving them blessings equivalent to those they asked. Thus Paul prayed three times, that the difficulty he was under might be removed. God did not remove it, yet he heard and answered his prayer, by saying, *my grace is sufficient for thee,* 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. Thus when we say we have prayed with earnestness, with a view to God's glory, but have met with no acceptance, we are under a mistake; he hears our prayers, though we perceive it not; and our souls are the better for praying, though we may not be so sensible of it.—Thus we see that all the complaints represented in this case, are consistent with our experience of the grace of God: and that therefore you have no reason to conclude that you are not Christians indeed, merely because you find it with you as it has been represented; for these are not the marks of hypocrites.

II. *As these things are so often discouragements to humble Christians, I would just in a few words show the usefulness of this method which God is pleased to take with his people.*—The

way to heaven is through the valley of *Baca*: it is a way of affliction, of temptation; a dark and discouraging way. But whatever the Christian may think of the difficulties of it, they are all useful; God is hereby glorified. His power is glorified, in keeping his people amidst such apparent dangers. His grace is exalted, as it appears to be free, rich, and abundant, in our salvation. His faithfulness is glorified, in fulfilling all the promises of his covenant; and his wisdom is glorified, in taking such methods with his people as best tend to answer his infinitely gracious purposes. These things are therefore far from being marks of the hypocrite, and should never determine us to *write bitter things against ourselves*. Besides, God brings good out of them to us. He is training us up by such methods for his everlasting kingdom. By temporal and spiritual difficulties we are brought to see more and more our own weakness, are guarded against self-dependence, and are enabled to rely more and more upon Jesus Christ. We are by this method humbled more, brought to see more of the glory and excellency of, and to acquiesce more heartily in, the gospel scheme. These things further tend to wean our affections more from present things, make heaven more glorious, and set us a longing after the enjoyment of it. Rest is the more welcome to the traveller that is weary, and the port to the sailor that has been in dangerous storms and tempests. And lastly, these things will afford us rich entertainment when we get to the heavenly world, and lay a foundation of everlasting admiration and praise. Here these various difficulties appear dark and discouraging to us, and are sometimes ready to upset us; but there we shall see the reason of all. There we shall view the need we had of afflictions and spiritual difficulties; how they humbled us, emptied us, quickened us. There we shall see how Almighty power kept us, how seasonably infinite grace stepped in to our relief, saved us from threatened and feared destruction, and made all things work together for our good. Oh! what entertainment, in viewing the conduct of providence and grace.

Thus then, these considerations are sufficient to keep us from concluding that the above complaints are inconsistent with grace, and from ranking ourselves amongst the almost Christians. Unless we have some other things which are sure marks of the hypocrite, what have been mentioned give us no reason to conclude that we are so.

III. *We should consider what appears favourable in our case, as well as what appears dark and discouraging.*—Though there

are so many difficulties in the case before us, yet there are many things that appear encouraging: particularly—The person has a sense of his blindness, emptiness, and ignorance.—I am blind, yea, very blind.—Would to God this was the language of every one in this assembly! Felt blindness is a great mercy. The Pharisees were filled with indignation at our Lord when he intimated they were blind, John ix. 41. *Are we blind also?* They were so far from being blind in their own apprehensions, that they were ready to imagine none had so much knowledge as they. The natural man thinks he knows enough, till the Spirit gives eyes to his mind; then he sees his soul full of darkness. That person is in a fair way for heaven, that sees, confesses, and bewails, his ignorance: grace, as soon as it is implanted, makes the soul out of love with self.

And is this thy case? Dost thou see thy blindness? Dost thou appear as nothing in thy own eyes? Dost thou now view thyself as a poor, ignorant, empty creature? Didst thou always appear so? Wast thou not once blind indeed, and yet unconcerned about it? Canst thou not say, whereas I was once blind, now I see? But methinks I hear thee saying, “True, I see; but what is it I see? I see my ignorance, I see enough to discourage me, viz. that I am a poor, blind, naked, empty, ignorant creature; that I am made up of wants.”—Bless God for this view of thyself. It would have been an awful thing to have been under an insensible blindness. If thou ever gettest to heaven, thou must be emptied of self first, and see and bewail thy ignorance and darkness. What should be matter of thankfulness to thee, is rather stumbling and discouraging. Oh, my dear friend, go to God and bless him, praise him, admire his grace, that he has given thee a view of thyself, has thrown down thy pride, and has made thee appear nothing in thy own eyes.

Again, *Another favourable circumstance in this case is, that this person has a sight and sense of his own vileness and unworthiness.* I am all sin and pollution? And dost thou really see thyself all sin and pollution? And art thou pleased with the sight, or art thou unconcerned about it, unhumbled for it? then indeed thy case is discouraging, whoever thou art. But if thou art lamenting over this view: if this sight of sin fills thee with self-abhorrence; if thou appearest vile and despicable on the account of it, it is then a happy, most happy circumstance in thy favour. Hear the Apostle himself making use of the most expressive language to represent his sinfulness, Rom. vii. 14. *I am carnal, and sold under sin.* Oh! my

friends, the more we see of our sinfulness, vileness, emptiness, &c. the more we should rejoice, provided this sight humbles us, lays us low, and has a proper influence upon us. The Spirit sees it absolutely necessary to do all this, that we may be brought into a gospel frame, a frame suited to the scheme of salvation which God has contrived and revealed. If we did not see our vileness, unworthiness, nakedness, &c. we should never close with Christ aright. But now we are made to receive salvation as a free gift, to depend upon the Redeemer alone, and to give God all the glory; do not be discouraged, my friend. If thy view of sin takes down thy pride, makes thee mourn and lament before God, and gives thee a sense of thy unworthiness, oh look back upon it as a token for good, and bless God for it.

Again, *Here is in this person a desire after grace, and that God would take his own way with him, so as he may be saved.*—There are many that are willing to be happy in a better world, but are not desirous of receiving salvation in God's own way. Convictions often make persons cry out, *Lord, what shall we do to be saved?* &c. but they cannot submit to the method of salvation. This is no sign of a good work begun. But when we see not only our guilt, but our odiousness through sin; when we see not only the excellency of happiness, but the excellency of holiness too; if, as far as we know our hearts, we are not only desirous of being saved from hell, but willing that God should take his own way, subdue sin in us, and bring us to an entire subjection to Jesus Christ: this is a comfortable evidence, that the Spirit of the Lord is at work in our hearts. And is this your case, my friends? Do you say, not in a sudden fit of rashness, but from real conviction, choice, and mature deliberation, Lord, take thine own way with us, make us holy? Are you breathing after a conformity to Jesus Christ? These things certainly appear encouraging in your case, and ought to be taken into your consideration, when you are examining into your state and condition.—But,

Again, *Here is a sense of the emptiness of the present world, and a preferring Christ above all things.*—The language of this person, I doubt not, is the language of many of your souls—"The nearest and dearest enjoyments to me here have their mixture: no solid peace nor pleasure will they give. I want for nothing here below, so much as the dear Redeemer."—And is this really the case? Art thou not mistaken? Is Jesus and his presence really lovely? Does the world lose all its glory; and appear insignificant and trifling when compared

with Christ? Dost thou want to love Christ, and to honour him more? What before thou wast ready to look upon as gain, dost thou now esteem loss for Christ? If this is thy case, there is encouragement to hope concerning thee. If we really find it thus with us, we have reason to rejoice and to admire the infinite, rich, and sovereign grace of God to us.

Lastly, *Another circumstance favourable in this case is, that this young person is enabled to pray, and yet has a deep sense of the unworthiness of his prayers, and his insufficiency to pray.*—In one part of this account our young friend complains he cannot pray; and yet says, I have cried and begged, and pleaded hard of the Lord, that he would teach me to pray. Now what is this but prayer? It is pouring out the heart before God, expressing our desires in words; though perhaps in a broken and imperfect manner. And what is this praying, says the humble soul? I have gone to God; I have in the distress of my mind put up a few broken petitions to the Lord, but have been ashamed of such praying, and could not entertain a kind thought of such poor duties. This, my friends, is praying, that praying that is acceptable to God through Christ. So prayed Hezekiah when he was in distress, Isa. xxxviii. 14. *Like a crane or a swallow so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove. Mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.* There are many hypocrites that pray: and if you think you shall be heard for your praying; if you pray only out of custom, or if you depend upon your prayers; this is no evidence of your being Christians. But if you love praying; if you make it your daily concern; if you are humble under it; if you cannot live without it, and yet place no dependence upon it, but reckon yourselves but unprofitable servants; however imperfectly you pray, it is a good evidence of a work of grace in your hearts.

Thus I have endeavoured to consider what is favourable in this case; and considering all these circumstances together, they certainly amount to a comfortable evidence of your being Christians indeed. And if you find it with your soul as I have endeavoured to represent, you have reason to be thankful, and to conclude that you are an object of God's distinguishing grace. However, do not take things upon a slight view, but examine your heart again, and again, that you may be not deceived in a matter of so great importance. Be impartial in your inquiries. Not only view your complaints, but consider what appearances there are of a work of grace, and do not be

rash in your conclusions; but if you find it as I have mentioned, give God the glory. And,

IV. *Guard against a distrustful unbelieving frame, and a habit of complaining.*—When things look dark with us, we are immediately ready to despond, and to draw some sad conclusion. We should be concerned indeed to maintain a godly jealousy over our hearts, but to have a jealousy and distrust of God, because he may hide his face from us, or afflict us, is by no means our duty: some Christians are almost always doubting; and what is the consequence? They dishonour God thereby; they provoke him to withdraw his presence and Spirit; they unfit themselves for the cheerful discharge of duties, and they rob themselves of peace and comfort. Distrust has no tendency in itself to promote your spiritual good. You that have been so timorous and unbelieving, that have put off the promises and the word of encouragement from you, have you found any real advantage in so doing? Have you been quickened more by it, loved Christ more, hated sin more, and got nearer to God? I appeal to you, has it not weakened your faith, disturbed your peace, and sometimes almost drove you from duty, by insinuating, it is to no purpose to continue praying, &c.—If this is the case, let me guard you, my friend, against an unbelieving frame: to be always doubting because your circumstances are apparently discouraging, will bring no advantage to your soul. Have you nothing that absolutely determines you to be a hypocrite? Do not conclude you are from the various circumstances of darkness you are in: there is no religion in doubting. Some persons have got a habit of complaining; whenever you converse with them, they have nothing to entertain you with but sad complaints. This arises either from a mistake of their duty, or from pride, being willing to copy after other's examples, and to be thought Christians of some excellency.

You will then say, what, if I am in darkness and real distress of soul, would you not have me speak of it? Yes, my friend, carry thy burdened soul, and unbosom it to thy minister or thy friend, tell him all thou feelest, all thou fearest, and do not be silent, and keep Satan's counsel. A person oftentimes goes distressed, because he will not open his heart to his friend. Be free, therefore, and keep nothing to thyself; but take care, at the same time, thou dost not contract a habit of complaining, as if any part of Christianity consisted in it. When thou art telling thy fears, tell thy hopes too, or what God has done for

thee. Take care and guard against a doubting frame, and do not think real humility lies in doubting; *Oh thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?* Why dost thou distrust? will that ease thee? will that cure thy wounded soul? will that bring thee nearer to God, recommend thee more to his favour, or prepare thee for a Saviour's mercy? Oh, no! that soul cannot go on in a flourishing and comfortable manner, who is much carried away with doubtings and distrust.—But methinks I hear you say, what would you have me then do? I cannot see myself in the light in which you have represented me.—To which I answer,

V. *Commit thyself into the hands of Jesus Christ, and leave thyself with him, wait upon him in all the means and ordinances he has appointed in expectation of receiving all that he has promised in thy complete and everlasting salvation.*—There is no other sanctuary whither thou canst fly and find safety; Christ is ready to receive all distressed souls; he is a *hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*, Isa. xxxii. 2. There is all fulness in him: he can supply every one want; he can remove every distress; he can deliver thee from wrath, cleanse thee from sin, recommend thee to his father, and cheer and comfort thy soul. In fine, he is an able and willing Saviour, exactly suited to all thy necessities and distressing circumstances. Go to him then, cast thyself upon him, leaving thyself with him, believing that he is what he has represented himself to be. Wait upon him in his ordinances; follow him in the use of all means, and so expect that he will do all that for thee and in thee that is necessary to thy complete salvation. So long as thou findest thy hope in Christ does not lessen thy esteem for ordinances and duties, or make thee negligent and careless, embrace it, entertain it, and let nothing rob thee of it, or drive thee from it. If thou wast to find, indeed, thy regard for the various duties Christ has appointed, growing weaker, thy soul growing careless and secure, then thou wouldst have reason to be afraid, and suspect thyself to be in a dangerous situation. But if thy love to ordinances is the same; if thou art desirous of following Christ in all the duties of religion, of honouring him by a humble and holy conversation, then be not afraid, only believe. Keep on waiting upon him in every ordinance; he will fulfil his promises, and keep that which thou hast committed to him against the great day. He never said to the seed of Jacob, *Seek ye my face in vain*;—*Blessed are they that hunger and*

thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Fear not, Christ is to be found in his ordinances; there he feeds his flock, and there he will meet with thy soul, and train thee up for heaven, and at length bring thee thither, however he may exercise thy faith with trials and difficulties here by the way.—I would just mention two things by way of reflection.

1. With what propriety may we put up the Apostle's petition, *Lord, increase our faith.* Was faith more in exercise, it would put our souls in a flourishing condition; it would quicken our zeal, increase our love, purify our hearts, scatter our fears, arm us against every difficulty, comfort our souls, and make us live and die like Christians, to the honour of our dear Mediator. Lord, then, increase our faith; breathe upon us, oh Eternal Spirit, strengthen this grace, bring it into exercise, that these happy and important ends may be attained.

2. How melancholy is their state that have no concern at all about their souls!—Let us drop a tear over them: *Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!*

THE
TOUCHSTONE
OF
SAVING FAITH.

[This important subject is taken under consideration in consequence of the following letter to me.]

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ **THROUGH** grace, (if I am not mistaken,) I have long had hope of being saved by Christ alone, and yet am at some uncertainties as to the nature of true faith; whether I am a real believer or not: and am concerned to know, if my hope be not the hope of a Pharisee, too much built upon such acts of the mind, as arise from a legal principle; such as, an humbling sense of the pollution of my nature, and the sinfulness of my heart, strivings against sin, endeavours after a religious frame of mind, raised affections in worship; together with some knowledge and belief of Christ in his glorious person and offices, that he is an all-sufficient, ready, free, and the only Saviour. I strive against any trusting in duties and frames; but still I want to know, whether I have been made partaker of the true saving faith, that is of the operation of God, though mixed or accompanied with doubts and unbelief. Therefore, Sir, I entreat you, in your lectures, to describe that faith, by which the soul makes out to, applies and receives Christ alone for salvation; to describe what are those thoughts or acts of the mind towards Christ, or God in Christ, which flow from regenerating grace, or the new principle of spiritual life implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit. *Principles* are known by their *effects*. This *principle* of living faith is known by its *acts*, by the inward frame, thoughts and affections of the heart. I have often heard of inward feelings of rest, joy, and peace, which I want and pray for. If a soul seeks to Christ at uncertainties, with this thought, *If I am saved it must be by Christ*

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alone, and therefore at a peradventure prays for pardon and salvation with some hope, is this a sufficient evidence of true justifying faith? Or may not an unrenewed sinner, under the influence of common grace, have these thoughts and desires working in his mind, and yet be destitute of the appropriating possession and enjoyment of Christ, or union with him? I have written thus much, because I would fain have my case rightly taken, and I hope you will comply with my request. Your kind instruction and help therein may be a means of my relief under this real concern of mind, and will much oblige me (perhaps many.) I am,

“ Reverend Sir,

“ With cordial respect,

“ Your’s,

“ A SINCERE SEEKER.”

P.S. Perhaps you will make more than one question to answer my desire.

This letter is evidently a serious and deep inquiry into the very vitals of religion, into the very essence and foundation of experimental Christianity; and therefore deserves the closest attention in considering it, and the utmost care in handling it. A mistake here may be most detrimental: and we ought to be very cautious, lest we fall into an error on either hand; lest the false hope of the hypocrite be encouraged, or the true hope of the gracious soul be discouraged. We must not administer peace, where there is no peace; nor yet grieve the hearts of those whom the Lord would not have made sad. To steer the direct course between presumption and despondency, is most desirable, and yet truly difficult. Let every one therefore read what follows with close attention, comparing it with the word of God, and begging that the Lord, the Spirit, may enable them to apply it to their own cases and consciences in a right manner.

The writer of the above letter very justly remarks, that it will be needful to solve more than one question, in order to answer the full design of it. And I think the two following will be sufficient.

Q. 1. *How far may a person's heart and ways be rectified, and he notwithstanding be destitute of saving faith?*

Q. 2. *How shall we know whether our faith be saving, amidst all the weaknesses and doubts that may attend it?*

Let us now attempt to bring ourselves to the touchstone of the sacred Scriptures, while we have laid before us the consideration of these two important queries; the former of which is of a very searching nature, and the latter of a very satisfying and consolatory nature.

To begin with the first:

How far may a person's heart and ways be rectified, and he notwithstanding be destitute of saving faith?

It is evident from Scripture and experience, that persons may come *very near* to the kingdom of God, and yet never actually enter into it. Permit me therefore to proceed in this inquiry *step by step*.

1. A person may be of a *very good natural temper*, and be endowed with many valuable qualifications, although destitute of saving faith. What is generally called *good-nature*, is a gift of Divine Providence, which is by no means peculiar to true believers. For those whose tempers are naturally rough, may be favoured with a principle of special grace, while persons of a sweet natural disposition may be total strangers to it. Although human nature is very degenerate and corrupt in all, yet we find sometimes many things very amiable in those that have no religion at all. There may be so much *decency, sobriety, humanity, compassion, generosity, fidelity*, and the like, in the natural dispositions of persons, as make them truly valuable, very agreeable, and really useful in life. Yea, it is very difficult to say how far a sweetness of temper, cultivated by an education, may extend its influence to the regulation of the conduct. But, after all, nothing is more evident, than that all this may be where there is no saving faith; for even a heathen, that knows nothing of Christ or his gospel, may be possessed of such amiable qualifications. And among those that are favoured with the light of revelation, there are apparently some of a rugged natural disposition, who have the true fear of God before their eyes; while others, with all their lovely qualifications, have no appearance of true religion. God is pleased to bestow his special blessings upon some of both sorts, on purpose to make us distinguish between *good-nature* and *saving grace*.

2. A person may be influenced by the principles of *civility* and *morality*, and yet be destitute of saving faith. He may see the necessity and propriety of doing justice and loving mercy; may see it to be his incumbent duty to do to others, as he would that others should do to him; and so become strict in his morals, upright in his conversation between man

and man; may abhor lying, cheating, and all kinds of deceit; have a great regard for honesty, and integrity, for paying his just debts, speaking the truth to his neighbour, and would upon all occasions do him justice. In a word, he may have a conscientious regard to the duties of the second table, both with respect to himself, and to his neighbour; and so be, what is generally called, a *sober, virtuous, honest, temperate, useful* person. All these things are doubtless very good in themselves; and where there is true religion, these things will be found. But let us not think them sufficient evidences of saving grace: for all these moral principles may be entertained and followed by a person that has never known, or perhaps heard of Christ. The young man in the gospel was evidently such a one, while a stranger both to the doctrine and to the experience of faith. Matt. xix. 18—20.

3. A person may be influenced by many *serious, religious principles*, and yet be without a principle of saving faith. He may have a serious regard to his duty towards God, as well as towards his neighbour and himself. His conscience may be impressed by a sense of the divine authority, his heart may be engaged by a sense of the divine goodness in providence, and his concern may be awakened by a consideration of the affairs of his precious immortal soul. All these things, and many more of the like nature may be, where there is not the least grain of true faith. These will appear strange assertions to many; but I doubt not to make them evident from the word of God, and from the nature of the thing. Let me descend into a few particulars: 1. A person may be constant to, and take delight in, devotional exercises; may give himself to reading good books, hearing of sermons, may fast and pray, and receive the sacrament, and after all be a stranger to the saving grace of God. Was not this the case of the Israelites? Isa. lviii. 2. Was not this the practice of the hypocritical and self-righteous Pharisees in Christ's time. And yet none can think that these were truly gracious. Let none therefore conclude that they have the grace of God, merely because they regularly attend to and upon devotional services. Yea. 2. A person may attend to these duties with real seriousness and concern for the welfare of his soul, and, so far as he knows himself, be *sincere* herein, having no hypocritical or worldly views. To use the words of a late valuable author: "Men in a *natural state* may have strong convictions of the infinite power, wisdom, justice, and goodness of God, and of the judgment to come, and of the everlasting happiness of the

godly, and the torments of the wicked: and their convictions may stir them up, not only to make a high profession, and to utter rare sayings concerning God and godliness; but also to labour with great earnestness to avoid all known sin, to subdue their lusts, to perform universal obedience to God in all known duties, to serve him with their lives and estates to the utmost, and to extort out of their hearts some kind of love to God and godliness, that, if possible, they may escape the terrible torments of hell, and procure everlasting happiness by their endeavours."

These are hard sayings to many. But I have two reasons to offer for the proof of these things. One reason is, because the Apostle Paul, before his conversion, appears to answer this character according to the account he gives of himself. And the other is, because all this seriousness, piety, and devotion, may be produced only by the general principles of the being and perfections of God, and the certainty of a future world, without any dependence upon, regard to, or right knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the person may be working upon purely self-righteous principles, thinking to make his way to heaven by his own strength and merit. It is indeed impossible to say, how far merely moral principles may work upon the mind, rouse the concern, affect the conscience, and stir up the endeavours. There may be much seriousness and devotion in the mind, without any thing of faith in Christ at the foundation. Nay, (3.) A person may be engaged to pay some regard to the inward part of religion. He may see something of the evils of his heart and thoughts, may mourn over them; he may strive to curb and subdue his passion, his pride, his revenge, his notional impurities, and the like: he may strive to get his heart affected in and by religious duties; may be very active and intent upon devout practices, in order to subdue his sinful lusts; and all this (pray observe it, with a view to obtain the favour of God, and to make some atonement for his sins; whereby he shows himself to be still wedded to the law, and to know nothing of faith in Jesus Christ. He may pray frequently and fervently, hear attentively, read seriously; and in the midst of all these things, be averse to the *freeness* of divine grace in Christ, and be building upon a *self-righteous* bottom, as the devout Pharisees did. Yea, (4.) He may have some desire after an interest in Christ, and his purchase; have some notion of the necessity of coming to him for salvation; while he does all these things to fit himself for Christ, and to appear before him. He strives, he mourns, he

prays, thinking that he may not, and ought not to come to Christ, until he has in some measure prepared and purified himself. Here is indeed an appearance of true humility, but there is a cursed pride at the bottom of all. He still goes about to make his own righteousness stand, and will not submit to the righteousness of God. He aims not to receive Christ and salvation as a free gift, but strives to entitle himself and recommend himself to Christ, by the excellency of his own prayers and endeavours. *Though he follows after the law of righteousness, he does not attain to the law of righteousness; because he seeks it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.* Rom. ix. 31, 32. Thus, you see how far a person may proceed in practical, devotional, and even experimental religion, without having the least degree of true faith in Christ.

4. A person may be well acquainted with, and be zealous for the *peculiar doctrines* of the gospel, and yet be destitute of saving faith. This is one thing mentioned in the above letter, namely, *a knowledge and belief of Christ in his glorious person and offices, that he is an all-sufficient, ready, free, and the only Saviour.* Doubtless there may be much notional knowledge of gospel doctrines without a principle of saving faith. For a person may understand the truth, and never feel the power of it; he may be orthodox in principle, and heterodox in practice. This is a truth that needs no proof to support it, because it is awfully verified in too, too many instances. Yea, a self-righteous principle may lurk under the appearance of disbelieving and disclaiming it. Are there not some, who, instead of making their knowledge of the gospel a means of leading them to Christ for grace and salvation, do make their very knowledge itself to be a part of their justifying righteousness? They pride themselves in it, make their boast of it, and think that because they are so intelligent and orthodox, therefore Christ will receive and save them. Thus their knowledge and zeal make them proud, instead of bringing them to the footstool of free grace. And where this is the case, there is great reason to suspect the want of saving faith, though orthodoxy of sentiment may be even joined with regularity of practice. For a person may understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and yet want that faith which worketh by love, 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

5. A person may be *affected* with the doctrines of the gospel and the love of Christ, and yet be destitute of saving faith. This I am obliged to add to all the foregoing, because the

Scripture is so express upon it, and because the superficial experiences of many confirm it. In Matt. xiii. 20, 21. we read of the *stony ground hearers*, who attend to the word with pleasure, and receive it with joy, and yet have no root in themselves. Thus many, in this day, attend upon the gospel with much delight, seem greatly pleased with it, and affected by it, and are sometimes raised almost to ecstasies and raptures; they are melted by the word, read or heard, and so are highly delighted. Now such as these, one would imagine, could not fail of being true believers, and we are ready to expect that they will prove eminent Christians. But alas! all this perhaps proves like the morning cloud, or the early dew; we soon find something in their temper and conduct, that carries a sad evidence with it, that the work is not solid and saving. As therefore we have such instances, it is dangerous to conclude from present feelings and motions. Under these occasional impressions, persons may seem cheerfully to venture their souls upon Christ, to be really and strongly desirous of an interest in him, may appear greatly delighted with the method of grace, and to have a flaming love to Christ, and zeal for his cause. In a word, there is scarce one experience you can mention as an evidence of true faith, but it is mimicked by the affections on such occasions. But, in reality, the word does not enter into the heart itself; it only floats on the imagination, and instead of being written or engraven upon the heart, the work appears to be superficial in the event. Some take occasion from such instances to confirm themselves in the denial of that most establishing doctrine of the saint's perseverance. But we must answer with the Apostle John, 1 Epis. ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us.* We must have more solid evidences for the truth of grace in the heart, than those which arise from the mere motions of the affections.

I must add one particular more.

6. A person may be *fully persuaded* in his own mind, that he has an interest in Christ, and yet be destitute of saving faith. There are some who make such a persuasion as this to be the very *essence* of saving faith; and so conclude that every person who can persuade himself, or be persuaded to believe Christ to be his, is a true believer; and that those who fall short of this persuasion are void of faith. This is a very *discouraging* and *dangerous* opinion. It is a very discouraging tenet, with respect to truly serious souls. For, if

none have the principle of faith in them, but such as are arrived to this assurance, then we must cast out of the list of true Christians many thousands of souls, who give the clearest proof, in every other respect, that they are born of God. It is the duty of gospel ministers to hold forth the freest encouragement to distressed, doubting souls, and so be helpers of their joy. But farther, this is a very *dangerous* opinion, and it is to be feared some have made an unholy use of it. Some persons of this notion apprehend that because grace is absolutely free, therefore all a sinner is to do, is to persuade himself directly and immediately, that Christ and all the blessings of grace are his. Thus they encourage a presumptuous hope, an ungrounded assurance; and would persuade persons at once to believe their interest in Christ; and then assure them that all is well. Do any such presumptuous persons read these lines, I would here take the freedom to describe their character, and read their doom. You say in your hearts, “ Well, since Christ and grace are free, I will therefore firmly believe that Christ is mine, and heaven is mine, let my conscience, let my conduct say what it will to the contrary. I am persuaded that all is well; and because I am so persuaded, therefore all is actually well with me: I will make it my chief business to keep this persuasion alive in my mind; and when any thing arises in my experience or conduct that will forbid the persuasion, I will believe through it all, and so prove the truth and strength of my faith, by believing in opposition to all my sense, feeling, and conversation.” And when a person is risen to such a pitch of presumptuous hope and assurance, he grows the looser in his conduct, and the more regardless about sin and duty, and looks down with contempt upon the poor doubting, but cautious Christian; esteeming him a *legalist* for the tenderness of his conscience, and for the sacred regard he has to practical and experimental religion. I hope there are not many who abuse the precious doctrines of free grace in such a vile manner. But be they more or fewer, they may see their picture, and read their doom, in Mic. iii. 11, 12. *The heads thereof judge for reward, &c. yet they will lean upon the Lord, and say, is not the Lord among us? Surely no evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, &c.* Those who will thus lean upon the Lord, will persuade themselves at all adventures that they are safe, while they regard iniquity in their hearts, and practise it in their lives, are the most detestable of all that wear the Christian name, and must expect to have their presumptuous

hopes totally demolished; while the poor, dark, conscientious Christian, whom they despise, shall be brought forth to the light of comfort and joy.

Let us now close up this branch of the subject, by a few words of improvement.

1. How *dangerous* is all *self-righteous* doctrine on the one hand, all *antinomian* doctrine on the other!

Both these sorts of doctrine are indeed very agreeable to proud, corrupt nature: this makes it pleasant, but the more pernicious. Some teachers discover no difference between good nature and saving grace; others make little more than mere morality the essence of their religion, not knowing the difference between heathenish morality and gospel holiness. And how dangerous must it be for souls to be led to depend upon their own piety, virtue, or devotion, instead of being directed to Christ, in whom alone salvation is to be found? But while morality and piety should not be so exalted, as to be put into the place of Christ for righteousness; so neither should the free grace of God be exalted in such a manner, as to neglect or darken the necessity of true holiness in heart and life. Ministers had need take special heed how they preach, and others should be as careful how and what they hear; lest the pride of human nature should be fed by self-righteous doctrine, or the corruption of human nature be indulged by antinomian doctrine. He is a true gospel divine that can keep the medium between these two extremes in his preaching; and he is a true Christian that keeps this medium in his experience and conduct. An inclining to either side, to the right-hand or the left, in preaching or practice, is very pernicious.

2. What necessity is there for all that make pretensions to religion, to examine themselves thoroughly, lest there be a flaw, an essential flaw in their religion! You may be possessed of many amiable qualifications, may have performed many duties, may make high pretensions, and a shining appearance in your own eyes, and in the eyes of others, without the least degree of true Christianity in the heart. Do not conclude you are true believers upon slight grounds. Are you *moral*? so was Paul when a stranger to a work of grace. Are you *devout*? so were the Pharisees, and yet were enemies to Christ. Are you *orthodox*? so are many that never felt the power of the truth. Are your affections sometimes moved under ordinances? so it was with the stony-ground hearers. Have you a persuasion within yourself that Christ is yours? so has many

a presumptuous enthusiast. Look therefore closely into your hearts and ways, and see whether, in the midst of all your profession and pretensions, you have that faith in Christ which worketh by love. Pray earnestly that the Lord would examine and prove you, that he would try your reins and your heart.

3. How desirable and useful are many things, that are yet short of true Christianity! We should not, we would not degrade or depreciate any of those particulars, which have been laid aside as insufficient evidences of a saving faith. God forbid, that we should despise civility, morality, devotional exercises, or scriptural knowledge. It is the duty of all to aim at, and seek after these things. And those who have believed in God, are under special obligations to maintain good works; for these things are good and profitable to men.

4. What a mercy is it that any are endowed with saving faith, and may come to the knowledge of it for themselves! Some may be ready to say, if these things are so, who then can be saved? But let us not say this in a way of discouragement, but rather answer ourselves; with men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. And, if we have any desire after this faith and salvation, or any concern about it, let us take that rule with us, Jam. iv. 6. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.*

Do you farther inquire, "How is it possible for me to know whether I have received this precious faith? I am afraid I have not, since there are so many things that are short of it, and so many difficulties attending the inquiry." I answer, let me entreat you to suspend your doubtful and gloomy thoughts upon this head, till you have seen or heard the other part of this subject. I would not have any serious soul discouraged by what has been offered. If the Lord should make it a means of demolishing any false hopes, or awakening the consciences of any deluded souls, it will be a great mercy to them; while the timorous soul, that desires to lean and live upon Christ, will, I trust, receive some encouragement from the plain solution of the next question.

We now proceed to the other question proposed.

How shall we know whether our faith be saving, amidst all the weaknesses and doubts that may attend it?

It will be very proper in this place to peruse afresh the letter, which occasioned both the questions; because this latter query,

as well as the former, is founded upon, and has a continual respect to it.

THERE is scarce a subject in divinity, wherein valuable sound divines are apparently more disagreed, and whereby Christians are more often perplexed, than this which relates to the nature and workings of true saving faith; and yet it is undeniably a subject of the greatest importance: for the implantation of this grace, and an experience of its workings and actings, are necessary to the very existence of vital Christianity. No subject is more plainly treated of, more copiously handled, nor more frequently referred to in the sacred Scriptures, than this. There is scarce a page in any of the devotional or doctrinal parts of the Bible, but *faith* is mentioned, or some of its actings described under the words *trusting*, *hoping*, *waiting*, *receiving*, and the like. What is the true reason of this disagreement among judicious Christians, is difficult to ascertain. But I am greatly apt to imagine, that the difference is chiefly in words; the subject itself being of an experimental nature, the appearances of saving faith being so very various, and language being scarcely adequate to the theme. Nothing is more difficult than to express, in proper words, the motions and workings of the mind. The great question is this, What is the nature of that act of the mind, whereby a soul betakes itself to Christ for all salvation? Does it include in it an assurance or persuasion of a person's own interest in Christ, and the blessings of salvation? If it does, what degree of this persuasion or hope is necessary in saving faith? And if it does not, wherein does the applying act of faith consist?—For my part, I shall endeavour to cast aside perplexing queries, and take the whole of what I have to say from the sacred Scriptures, mentioning and explaining the ideas the Bible gives us of the nature and actings of saving faith; hoping that this method will strike out the clearest light, and afford the most satisfying evidence.

The subject is very copious and large, because the scripture is so full and distinct upon it; but I shall confine myself chiefly to those searching, interesting questions that are put, and to those difficulties that are started in the *letter*, upon which both these cases of conscience are founded.

The writer of the letter desires me to describe that faith, by which the soul makes out to, applies and receives Christ alone for salvation; to describe what are those thoughts or acts of the mind towards Christ, which flow from, and are

proper evidences of regenerating grace. He next proceeds to argue in a judicious way upon it, by observing that principles are known by their effects, and that therefore this principle of living faith must be known by its acts, by the inward frame, thoughts and affections of the heart. And then puts a question, Whether a soul's applying to Christ for salvation with a *peradventure*, is a sufficient evidence of justifying faith?

All these questions I shall endeavour to give a reply to, by explaining the language and ideas of scripture on the subject, which I apprehend is the best and safest, and likewise the clearest method. Bear with me then, while I expatiate freely upon it; and let me beg you to read with peculiar attention, as upon a matter that concerns the life of your souls.

We have an exact and ample description of this grace of faith in that well-known passage, Heb. xi. 1. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* Without any learned or critical remarks upon this text, we may easily observe, that what faith fixes upon as its object, are things *invisible* or *future*; *things hoped for*, and *things not seen.* And thus it is distinguished from *sight.* Now it is here said, that faith is the *substance* of things hoped for; as it gives these things a substance or subsistence in the mind, by substantiating and realizing them to the mind, and impressing them upon the heart. It is likewise the *evidence* of things not seen; as it applies the evidence of their reality to the mind, and makes them as evident and real to the soul, as if they were visible things. So that the whole is this: faith in itself is nothing else but the real impression and application of gospel truths, and gospel promises. When a person truly believes, the gospel is written in and upon the heart, engraven upon the spirit of the mind; so as to become the principle of a person's actions and affections. Carnal and worldly persons are acted upon, and influenced by worldly and carnal principles; but believers, as such, are acted upon and influenced by gospel principles. And those gospel principles are chiefly such as these, that Christ is a most necessary, most suitable, most free, and an all-sufficient and the only Saviour. If a person has these truths not only printed upon his imagination, but written upon his heart, and applied to his own case and conscience, he is then possessed of saving faith.

But a person cannot clearly know that these truths are savingly impressed and applied, but by the motions and actings of his mind in consequence thereof. For let a person have ever so clear a knowledge of the truth, ever so firm a belief of

it, ever so great a value for it, or have his affections ever so much moved by it; yet if his soul is not excited to those actings, which are suited to the truth believed, he has no proof of his being possessed of this saving principle.

You will ask then, what are those actings of the heart which are suited to, and produced by the saving impression of such gospel truths? I answer in scripture language, if any one truly believes, for himself, his own necessity, and the fulness and freeness of Christ, as a Saviour, he is induced hereby to *fly to him*, to *trust in him*, to *lean upon him*, *lay hold of him*, to *go to him*, to *take shelter* under him, to make him his *refuge*, his *portion*, his *hope*, and his *salvation*. Here lies the centre of the whole evidence; not in the degree of a person's knowledge, nor in the degree of his persuasion concerning his own personal interest.

You will proceed to ask, What is this *coming to Christ*, *receiving of him*, *leaning upon*, *taking shelter* under him, and the like? I answer, all these phrases, though various in words, are the same in sense, when applied to the workings of the mind, and so they illustrate and confirm each other. So that it is much the same, which of these I fix upon; and it would be too tedious to run through them all distinctly. They are all of them figurative expressions; taking a natural and common idea, and applying it to the spiritual motions and actings of the soul; and therefore are all to be understood in a spiritual sense. I would make choice of *one* out of these various phrases, and explain it with a particular view to *doubts* on the one hand, and *assurance* on the other.

That which I shall at present fix upon, is the act of *flying to a refuge*, or *taking shelter under a covert*. Christ is the true city of refuge, and souls in believing, are represented as fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, Heb. vi. 18. Christ is a *covert* from the tempest, Isa. xxxii. 2. and believers by faith take shelter under it. Let me then illustrate and diversify this similitude in a familiar way.

Let us suppose a person in the field to see a terrible storm a-coming, which he wants to be sheltered from. The sight makes his heart tremble with a peculiar awe and fear. Let us likewise suppose him to be informed of, or to see, a safe refuge, shelter, or covert at hand. Now let this person be ever so well persuaded of the safety of this shelter, and his welcome to it, yet if he does not actually take sanctuary under it, he is still exposed to the violence of the storm, whatever be his motive or reason for not flying to it. Perhaps he may

be indifferent about it, not apprehending the storm to be very dangerous; or he may think to weather it himself without a shelter; or he may have dislike to the shelter itself, or may think that some other shelter may be sufficient for him. In either of these cases he still neglects to fly to it, and so must take the consequences, although he may see the storm, and believe the freeness and safety of the refuge proposed. This is an exact representation of the case of the sinner, who begins to be under some concern about his soul; has learned, and does believe in a sense, that Christ Jesus is a free and sufficient shelter; but either through indifference about Christ, or through dislike to him, or through an opinion of his own sufficiency, still keeps off from Christ, as the true Saviour, and so stands exposed to the storm of God's wrath, notwithstanding all his knowledge of, and opinions about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us next put the case in a different point of view; and suppose a person seeing a storm coming, and greatly terrified by the apprehensions and appearance of it, but knows very little of the shelter that is near at hand: he has heard something of it, enough to make him wish that he was under it, and to be persuaded he would be safer there than any where else; but may question whether he shall be admitted into it, whether he has any right to fly to it; and many other such doubts and fears may possess him. Yet he is driven by mere necessity, sees no other relief, and upon the whole has such a glimmering hope, that possibly he may be admitted, while he is certain to be destroyed otherwise; he, therefore, in this trembling way, actually betakes himself to it, and so is safe, whether he apprehends it or no for himself in the act of flying to it. For his actual safety is not hindered by the fears of his soul, nor would it be promoted by any notional assurance; but the whole of his security depends upon the safety of the refuge itself, and upon his admittance into it, on his recurring to it, and taking sanctuary under it. This is an exact representation of the frame and condition of a poor soul, who knows but little of Christ, fears much through the weakness of his faith, and yet ventures through all objections to cast himself upon the Lord Jesus for all salvation. I will leave it to your own thoughts to apply the similitude more distinctly; and shall proceed to collect from hence the real workings of the believer's heart in the act of believing on, or running to Christ for spiritual safety.

Casting aside the natural simile, and the outward act of

flying, we are now to attend to the works of the soul, both when faith is very *strong* and *clear*, and when it is very *dark* and *feeble*.

If faith acts in a very *vigorous*, *lively*, and *comfortable* manner, the language of the heart is to this purpose: "My misery I feel to be exceeding great, my state I see is in itself exceeding dangerous and helpless; I know and see that there is no help in myself; I cannot atone for one sin, I cannot root out one corruption, I cannot perform one duty myself; neither can I secure myself from that vengeance that is due to me, or prevent my being miserable for ever: but, O my soul, do not therefore despond, I have heard of a glorious all-sufficient Saviour; one who is able to save to the very uttermost, having made a perfect atonement, and wrought out a perfect righteousness for poor, miserable, guilty wretches, such as I am. The truth of God and the oath of God assure me that this salvation is altogether free; that the most unworthy, guilty, and polluted souls are welcome to Jesus, coming to him for pardon and purification; that I myself, notwithstanding all my sin and misery, am not excluded from this hope and salvation; I will, therefore, without hesitation or fear, repair directly to this Saviour, thankfully accept of his whole salvation, being fully persuaded, that *him that cometh he will in no wise cast out*. I believe his promise, I will go and plead his own word, and lay a bold, but humble claim to all the salvation I need; nothing shall hinder me from this confidence in him; but I will go and call him *my* Saviour and *my* God, *my* portion and *my* salvation; knowing that he will not disappoint my hope, deny my claim, or rebuke my confidence; though I am in myself so utterly unworthy and polluted." The soul having thus by faith in free grace, reasoned itself into this glorious hope, immediately repairs to Christ, pleads the promises, claims Christ and all his salvation, and finds rest in him. Oh, what satisfaction and consolation, what joy and triumph does the soul now experience! This is the joy and pleasure of faith; founded not upon any past evidences, but upon the entire fulness and freeness of Christ. Now this satisfaction in Christ produces a hearty love to him, delight in him, and a desire to honour and serve him for ever. It makes the soul abandon all self-righteousness, as nothing worth; and to hate every false and sinful way, as dishonourable and abominable to that Jesus whom it loves with a superlative affection.

But if faith acts in a very *weak*, *feeble*, and *uncomfortable* manner, the heart speaks to this purpose; "O my soul, in

what a miserable condition art thou ! Surely I am a lost creature, I am ruined, I have ruined myself, my sins cry aloud for vengeance, and my heart is above measure, beyond conception, polluted and abominable. I cannot help myself, all the creation cannot help me ; my sins are gone over my head, as a heavy burden, too heavy for me to bear ; and oh, what shall I, what can I do ? Whither shall I fly for shelter from the wrath due to me, and how shall I get this sinful heart of mine cleansed, fit to appear before God ? O I am lost, utterly undone in myself. But is there no help, no hope ? I have heard, indeed, that there is an all-sufficient and gracious Saviour provided ; but I greatly fear whether he will pity me and save me. I cannot believe that ever I shall be welcome to him, cannot think that ever he can pardon such a vile sinner, or will cleanse such a polluted heart as mine is. I cannot apprehend that such infinite favours as I must have, or perish, will ever be granted to one so ill-deserving and hell-deserving as I. Surely I can never be one for whom he shed his precious blood, and therefore can expect no welcome at his throne, no admittance into his love. But my necessities press hard upon me ; if I stay in this condition, my damnation is certain. It is, however, possible there may be some hope. If I go to him, and venture to lay myself at his feet, it cannot make my condition worse. I will therefore go and confess my sins, and see if there be any mercy for me. But what shall I say ? I tremble to think of appearing before him, whose name I have dishonoured, whose blood I have trifled with, whose mercies I have abused, and whose calls and invitations I have slighted. However, go I will, and if I perish, I perish." Whereupon the poor desponding soul ventures to the throne of grace, pours out its complaint, confesses its guilt, mentions something in a trembling manner of the free grace of Christ ; and perhaps is in such a fright, under such tremor and dread, that it knows not where it is, nor what it is about : little thinking that it is now acting faith upon Christ. Well, being thus come, the soul receives just encouragement enough to go again and again ; and from this time forward it loves and prizes a throne of grace, is watchful against every thing that may grieve the Spirit, and offend the Saviour ; it seeks to no other refuge, but looks this way alone, and receives such a view of Christ as to make him lovely and desirable. Though darkness and doubts may still possess the mind, yet it will cleave to Christ, heartily desiring to be found in him, and to be made more and more like him.

A person that approaches to Christ, and acts in this trembling way, obtains the same *safety*, though he does not possess the same *comfort* and *assurance*, with the former. For our safety does not depend, as I said before, upon our assurance, but upon the welcome which Christ gives to the coming sinner. Though we believe not with such assured faith, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself. Oh what encouragement is here for the weak faith of such trembling souls, to show them what hope they may entertain, and what free promises they may plead!

There are various degrees between these two opposite cases which I have represented; and there is a vast variety of experience. For the same soul, that at one time comes with trembling, may at another time receive farther hope, and then sink back again into the same discouragement as before; while a person that has at first fled to Christ with much assurance, may have his faith assaulted and staggered afterwards. In other persons there is a great mixture of hope and fear, joy and distress, by turns; but, in general, there is a gradual increase of hope and love; for the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Let me once more observe, that there is a great variety, not only as to the strength or weakness of faith; but likewise as to means and ordinances, in and by which it works. For with some these actings of faith are exercised in a way of serious meditation; whilst others cast themselves upon Christ by prayer; and not a few have these workings drawn forth in reading or hearing the sacred oracles. And those who observe the motions of their souls will find, that in either of these ways the soul does actually, seriously, and cordially betake itself to Christ, and cast itself upon him.

Thus I have endeavoured to describe in a plain and familiar way, chiefly under *one* figure, that of flying to a refuge, the special actings of saving faith. I might in the same manner run through and expatiate upon the other representations of it; such as, *coming*, *leaning*, *receiving*, and the like. But this is unnecessary, because it would still be found to be the same thing, the same sort of act under them all. For it is the coming to a free fulness, leaning upon a free prop, receiving a free gift, as well as running to a free shelter. And under them all, there is really an appropriating possession of Christ, and an application of him to the soul with greater or less degrees of hope and comfort, founded upon the free welcome the gospel gives to a coming sinner.

But after all that has been said, it must be confessed that sometimes the very act of faith is so weak or confused, that a person cannot, by a reflection upon these transactions between Christ and his soul, arrive at a clear persuasion whether he has believed or not : it might therefore be proper to say something more upon this head, to give all the light I am able into the matter. Sometimes, indeed, faith acts in such a powerful and perspicuous manner, that it evidences itself, the spirit witnessing with our spirits, that *we are the children of God* ; and then a person can no more doubt of his interest, or of the truth of his faith, than he can deny or overlook the clearest and strongest motions of his own soul. In this case, the soul can at once say, *My Lord and my God*, can directly appropriate a saving promise, taste the sweetness of it, and apply the blessings to itself.

Besides, it may appear, that there is a deceit even in the soul's own assurance ; this may be only a flighty passion, a fond imagination, or a dangerous delusion ; the *assurance of faith*. It is therefore highly necessary, that this persuasion itself should be examined into, and brought to the test of sacred scripture. While, on the contrary, those who have not any clear assurance at all, may be proved from the Divine word to be true believers. There may be such fears mixed with our hope, such unbelief with our faith, or the act of faith may be in itself so weak, that it may be impossible, from these experiences themselves, to prove our interest. Yea, we may be so dark in our minds, or so very jealous of our own hearts, as to make us afraid to draw the happy conclusion in our favour. And what must we do in these cases ? Surely we may and ought to recur to marks and signs, according to the apostle's direction, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith* ; while he at the same time insinuates the most substantial evidence for it, namely, that *Christ is in us, except we be reprobates*. And if we pay any regard to the present experiences of believers, we shall often find, that a soul has fled to Christ at first in the dark ; not having received any clear consolation, till afterwards the fruits of faith in the heart and life have been discovered ; and this discovery by the word and Spirit of God, has been the first introduction of a comfortable and settled hope.

I will therefore endeavour now to put you and myself into a proper and clear way to know whether our faith be saving, amidst all the weakness and doubts that may attend it, by producing a few satisfactory marks and evidences. And may the

Lord enable all that peruse these lines, and who are in doubt, to put the questions home to themselves, that may be proposed! There is a great variety of marks and signs of this grace laid down in the word of God, and judiciously opened and applied by divines; such as an aversion to sin, the Spirit of prayer, conquest over the world, and the like, which are all good and solid marks, if rightly understood. But the only thing that can determine whether our hatred of sin, or contempt of the world, or love to God, &c. flows from faith, and is evidential of it, is an inquiry into the principles and motives of these experiences. I shall therefore aim to put the questions as close as I can, to search into the very springs of our conduct.

I must take it for granted of every one who has true faith, that to him (1) himself is vile, (2) the gospel is precious, (3) sin is hateful, (4) holiness is desirable, (5) Christ is honourable, (6) God's children are amiable. He is no true Christian that cannot set his seal to these things: for if a person is proud of himself, slights the gospel, makes a mock at sin, is not concerned to be conscientious in duty, despises Christ, or dislikes the people of God as such, he can have no apparent pretensions to this holy and spiritual grace. But still it is not enough for us to apprehend that we have the above marks; because there is a sort of humility, hatred of sin, love to Christ and holiness, that does not flow from faith; and there may be an appearance of all these things from legal principles. Wherefore, under each of these heads, I must put the questions double: *Whether it is so with you, and why it is so?*

1. *Are you vile and base in your own sight?* This I apprehend is mentioned as a characteristic of a true saint in Ps. xv. 4. We read it thus, *in whose eyes a vile person is contemned*: I rather choose to render it, *Who is vile and despised in his own eyes*. This every true Christian is before God, because he sees so much of the meanness and corruption of his nature, and of the majesty and purity of God. But it is to be apprehended, that some persons may answer this character, who have been only under a legal work, not knowing any thing experimentally of faith in Christ. I must therefore ask farther, *What is it that makes you thus appear low and contemptible in your own eyes?* You may see enough of yourself, your sin, and your misery, to discourage you and drive you to despair, and yet have a legal pride at the bottom of all this seeming humility; and this may keep you from Christ, by making you unwilling to go to him, till you can purify yourselves to prepare yourselves for him. But if your humility is promoted by, and

founded upon, a view of the freeness of grace in Jesus Christ, so as you see, that if you are saved, it must be by free, powerful, preventing grace; and the sight of grace as absolutely free, melts your soul, subdues your pride, and shames your unbelief; this is a good mark that you have seen Christ, and believed on him. Or thus, if you are humbled and ashamed in yourself, not only because you have broken the law, but likewise because you have been so unbelieving as to the grace of the gospel; because you have no more trusted in Christ, loved him no more, and have sought him with no more eagerness and delight: I say, if such things as these make you low, vile, and abominable in your own sight, it is a happy evidence, that you have had something of the gospel engraven upon your heart.

2. *Is the gospel precious to you?* This is another thing that is universally true of all believers; *who as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby,* 1 Pet. ii. 2. But it is certain, that persons may be fond of the gospel, may be zealous for its doctrines, and plead its cause without having ever felt the saving power of it upon their hearts. Ask yourselves therefore another question: Why is it that the gospel is precious to you? What are the peculiar doctrines of it, that you are most acquainted with; and why do you lay such a stress upon them? For instance, the atonement of Christ, the imputation of his righteousness, and the divinity of his person. Cannot you bear to part with these truths, because you see and feel that in them is contained all your salvation, all your desire, and all your hope? Can you say for yourself, that if these doctrines are uncertain, all your comfort and expectation is removed, and the very foundations destroyed? If your value for these truths arises from an inward conviction that you must be lost without them, and from such a regard to the honour of Christ, that you cannot bear to have him so degraded and dethroned; this is a blessed sign that your regard for the gospel flows from, and is evidential of, a saving belief of it.

3. *Is sin hateful to you?* This is another particular, without which a person cannot be supposed to be a true believer; but for this to be a proper proof of a true faith in the heart, it is necessary you should farther inquire, *Why you hate it?* If you detest it merely because it endangers your reputation, or distresses your conscience, or hurts your constitution, or merely because it renders you liable to everlasting misery; the strongest detestation of any iniquity upon *these* grounds, will not prove

the truth of faith in your hearts. But if you hate sin, because Christ died for it; if you see the sinfulness of it, as appearing in the cross of Christ; if you can look upon a suffering Jesus, and mourn for your sins, as what pierced the Saviour; if you cannot bear to indulge it in any of its appearances, because it would be the highest ingratitude to Christ, who loved us so as to give himself for us: such grounds as these for hating of sin will evidence a person to have believed in Christ, and have had some true taste of his love.

4. *Is holiness desirable to you?* Or is it your desire and endeavour to walk in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless? This is a necessary ingredient in true Christianity; for it is a scripture maxim, *that without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. He in vain pretends to have true faith, who has no real love to, and desire after holiness. But for this to be an evidence of true faith, you must farther inquire, *Why you love it?* Perhaps you would be glad to be regular and obedient, in order thereby to promote your temporal interest, or to advance your good name, or perhaps to recommend yourselves to God by your own righteousness. Such by-ends, or selfish, and self-righteous views being at the bottom of your obedience and endeavours, will spoil all, and rather prove that you are destitute of true faith; but if your regard for and aim at holiness, arises from a love to Christ, a desire to serve and glorify him; if it is a sense of his love, and a view of his loveliness, that quickens and constrains hercunto; this is a blessed evidence that your faith is saving, howsoever dark or doubting your frames may be.

5. *Is Christ Jesus honourable in your esteem?* We are expressly told that he is so to them that believe, 1 Pet. ii. 7. Believers have a real value for him, love to him, and estimation of him. But in order to know whether this value for Christ is of the right kind, and is evidential of saving faith, it is necessary to inquire, *Upon what accounts* Christ is precious to you? Is it merely because he is able and willing to save from the wrath to come? or is it because he saves from sin, as well as from wrath? Do you value Christ because he is an *effectual* Saviour? and an absolutely *free* Saviour, and a *holy* Saviour? Perhaps you like that he should assist you to save yourselves; but do not like that he should do it effectually, by his own efficacious grace; or, it may be, you would like to be interested in his redemption, but had rather receive it upon conditions to be performed by you, than as a free gift; or you may like that he should save you from the *desert* of sin, while you had rather

have him spare *sin* itself. A regard for Christ, and his salvation, in either of these ways, is no evidence of saving faith. But if you esteem, honour, and value Christ, because he saves *freely* and *effectually*, and that both from the *guilt* and from the *power* of sin, this will prove that your faith is saving.

6. Lastly, *Are the children of God amiable to you?* This is another necessary characteristic of a true believer. *For we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*, 1 John iii. 14. But let us take heed of a deceit here. You may love the children of God, because perhaps they are, some of them, your particular friends, or your relations; or because they have been kind to you; or because their natural temper, and valuable qualifications, make their conversation agreeable to you. Such things as these may draw forth a strong affection in you towards them, while you yourselves may be strangers to the grace of God. Ask yourselves therefore, *Why* you love them? If it be, because they bear the image of Christ, because they are holy, serious, spiritual, heavenly, and zealous for Christ, and if you love them the more, the more you see of these things in them, whatever they may be in other respects; this is a proof that the same principle of faith and love is in you, that is in them.

By putting such queries as these, a person may, under the influence of the divine Spirit, arrive at this important knowledge, whether he has saving faith or no. Though perhaps you cannot recollect the particular actings of your minds towards Christ, cannot observe the special workings of faith in your souls; yet if you can say, that you are low in your own eyes, that the gospel is precious to you, sin hateful, holiness desirable, Christ honourable, and God's children amiable, and can find that the reasons and grounds of this temper of spirit are of an evangelical nature; you may humbly and safely conclude, that this divine principle is wrought in your souls.

Let me now conclude the whole with a suitable improvement, by way of *information, consolation, humiliation, and direction*.

1. For *information*. Hence learn, that a person may safely make use of marks and signs, to know whether he has truly believed or no. I make this plain remark, upon account of one paragraph in the epistle, which occasioned this discourse. The writer expresses himself as concerned to know, whether his hope be not too much the hope of a Pharisee; too much built upon such acts of the mind, as arise from a *legal* principle; such as his *humility*, his *striving* against sin, and his

endeavours after a religious frame of mind ; that is, he queries whether a hope raised upon such evidence is not *legal*, and does not tend to make him trust in duties and frames. To which I answer, that to raise our hopes upon such experiences as are or may be of a legal-kind, is indeed very dangerous. But we must not carry this thought so far as to deny or depreciate the use of marks and signs, for fear of trusting in them. It is indeed very difficult to take encouragement and hope from marks and evidences, without relying upon them, or putting them in the room of Christ. But there are two things that will prevent us from doing thus.

One is, to look upon nothing as a true evidence of faith, that has not an evangelical principle at the bottom of it. If we take our encouragement from our humbling sense of sin, from our strivings against it, and from our endeavours after holiness, without inquiring what it is that makes us humble, penitent, and diligent, we are in danger of being deluded by a false evidence, and of placing our confidence upon it, rather than upon Christ. But if we are concerned to look into the motives and principles of our humility, repentance, and diligence, and to see that a regard to Christ in all his offices be the grounds thereof, then our evidence is true ; and we are not in such danger of falling into a legal frame ; because now nothing but *Christ in us* is our hope of glory.

The other thing necessary to prevent us from trusting in frames, evidences, and duties, is to make use of the hope we have obtained from them, to encourage us farther to trust in Christ, and live upon him. Having obtained some good hope, through grace, of an interest in Christ by way of reflection upon past experience, we are now to say in our hearts, “ Has Christ revealed himself to me so freely, graciously, and powerfully ? Let me then go to him with an enlarged confidence for all those supplies of grace, strength, and comfort, that I want, being encouraged herein by the experience I have had of his free grace and almighty power.” If we therefore raise our hope from such evangelical marks, and improve it to farther reliance upon Christ, we are not guilty of trusting in frames or duties.

2. For *consolation*. Happy, thrice happy is he, that is endowed with this special grace, the mother, as I may say, of all the rest ; for the word of God solemnly declares, that he who believeth is justified, will be sanctified, and shall be eternally saved ; that he has an interest in all spiritual blessings, in all the sure mercies of David. He that has this divine

principle of saving faith, is safe, whether he knows it or not; yea, the least degree of it is saving, whatever doubts or weaknesses may attend it. Let me assure you, O believers, that you need not be discouraged, because of your many darknesses, fears, enemies, or temptations, for you shall come off more than conquerors, through him on whom your faith rests. You may be apt to perplex your minds, and sink your spirits, because your faith is so weak, because you cannot distinctly recollect the actings of it in your experience, or have not had those deep, awful convictions of sin, or those lively joys and comforts, that others can relate. But do not distress yourselves for want of these feelings; if you can conscientiously answer the foregoing questions, your state is safe, though you fall short of many others in knowledge, in comfort, and lively experiences. Wherefore comfort yourselves with these words; remembering that *Christ will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory.*

3. For *humiliation*. Can we prove the truth of our faith only by the motives and grounds of our humility, devotion, or diligence? How many of the experiences and duties of believers themselves are defective in this respect? How many by-ends, selfish views, and carnal motives lie at the foundation of most of our performances? Surely we have all reason to lament the weakness of our faith, and its absence from many of the services we engage in. Let us humble ourselves before God, that our repentance, our resolutions, our hopes, our comforts, our obedience, and all our duties are no more evangelical, having so little of faith under them and in them.

4. For *direction*. Though we may make use of marks and signs to try the truth of our faith; yet let us take care not to live upon these evidences, but to live by faith on Christ. You have had a large description of the direct acts of faith in this answer; and let me assure you, that the best way to clear up your evidences, to strengthen your graces, and to promote the life of religion, is, to be found frequently thus acting upon Christ, flying to him, and taking sanctuary in him. Are you in *darkness*? go to him for light. Are you in doubts through unbelief? go to him for satisfaction and consolation. Are you weak and feeble? go to him for strength. Let every complaint drive you to him. Make use of every ordinance to direct you to him. Improve every comfort and hope to attract you to him, and to encourage your confidence in him. In this way, by frequent recurring to Christ, you will find, not only

your faith cleared and strengthened, but likewise true grace, true holiness, and true consolation advancing in your soul, till faith be swallowed up in sight, and hope in enjoyment.

QUEST. III.

When may a person conclude that he enjoys God in the performance of duty?

A VERY serious and weighty query indeed! I wish I was able to answer it, from a happy and large experience of the enjoyment of God.—By *duty* here, I suppose is meant not any common function of life, which may be performed without the help of special grace; but any religious duty, which God, in his word, hath enjoined on his people, and in the performance of which he graciously condescends to meet with them, according to his promise. Such are the duties of prayer, &c.

1. To enjoy God in duty, is to enjoy his gracious assistance, or the enlightening, quickening, strengthening, and sanctifying influences and operations of his Spirit; without which it is impossible to perform any duty in a right, holy, and acceptable manner. Then one may conclude that he enjoys God in duty when his mind is impressed with a deep sense of the reasonableness, use, and design of the duty; when he willingly and heartily engageth in it, in the name of the Mediator; with reverential thoughts, and a holy awe of God; with a single view, and ardent desire to glorify God; with self-abasement, and inward loathing of himself before God; with humble and sincere reliance upon him; and with unutterable breathings and pantings after him:—When he wholly resigns his heart to God; to be constantly governed, eternally possessed, and perfectly sanctified by him:—And, in short, whenever the graces of the Spirit are in real exercise. These things, I think, cannot be experienced by a soul destitute of the influence and assistance of the Divine Spirit.

2. I humbly conceive, that a person may be said to enjoy the presence of, and have fellowship with God in duty:—When he heartily approves of, and contemplates with pleasure upon the Being, Attributes, Works, Providence, Word, and

Worship of God:—When his thoughts are emptied of all creatures, but filled with a holy and delightful meditation, upon the glorious perfections of God:—When he esteems and confides in God, as his God and everlasting portion; viewing the Father, as his Father in Christ; looking upon the Son, as his only and complete Saviour; and regarding the Holy Spirit, as his sanctifier, comforter, and guide: and all this with a solid peace, heavenly, calm, and unspeakable satisfaction:—When he feels his heart glowing with gratitude, and flaming with love to God; Father, Son, and Spirit; and doth experience such perfect oneness, such strong union, and such sweet and delightful fellowship between God and his immortal part, so far that it exceeds all fellowship and union between his soul and any creature whatever; and which, he cannot possibly express; as if God was nearer and dearer to him than his own self, interwoven with his very heart, and become the life and essence of his inmost soul:—When he doth not only *confide* in, and *love* God, as his God, but doth *see* and *know* that he is so, enjoying sweet manifestations and clear discoveries, of the love and mercy of God to his soul:—When gospel promises are so powerfully applied to him; when his heart is so filled with sacred joy, and overpowered with heavenly light; and when the Holy Spirit witnesseth to his Spirit, his election, vocation, &c. so clearly and free from doubts, that he cannot forbear, breaking out thus, or to this effect:

“ Oh, my God! my God indeed! now I cannot question thy love; oh! I feel it! I feel it! nor do I doubt of my interest in thee! nay I am thine, and that for ever! I! the vilest wretch! the meanest worm! astonishing!—Thou hast created me in order to redeem and create me anew! oh my heavenly Father! now I behold thy smiling countenance! now I am happy beyond expression! O, what joy do I now feel! what glory do I now behold! what a treasure I now possess! the world, the whole world, cannot give what I now enjoy! 'tis heaven; 'tis Thou, O my God, that thus fills, and more than fills, my soul with bliss; *with joy unspeakable and full of glory*.—Oh! precious Redeemer, thou hast died for my sins! yes! for mine!—Oh! thou divine Sanctifier, thou hast changed my vile and abominable heart! thou hast raised me from death to life! thou hast brought me from the suburbs of hell, to the gate of heaven! now I feel the everlasting arms of Jehovah underneath me; and behold the attributes of the most High, as so many bulwarks round about me! O! I am infinitely secure, and eternally happy! O lovely Jesus! how gladly

would I bid adieu to all below the sun, and turn mine eyes from every earthly object, to gaze eternally upon thy transcendent beauties and divine perfections!

“ But oh! how distressing the thought of losing this precious taste of thy love! and especially of my proving, after all this kindness to me, unthankful, unstable, and unfaithful to thee! Oh, that I might never sin once from henceforth! Hasten the time, O my God, when, instead of sipping now and then by the way, I shall eternally drink of the water of life at the fountain-head! and appear in thy presence, to spend eternal ages in wonder, bliss, and praise!”

I do not think that every Christian doth enjoy an equal degree of the soul-refreshing presence of God, which holy men of old called, *the light of his countenance*. Neither do I believe that any enjoys all that I have observed, whenever God is present with him in duty. A believer may enjoy a comfortable portion of the divine presence, so as to experience sweet serenity, inward tranquillity, and inexpressible calmness; yet, without strong raptures, and transporting ecstasies. —I am likewise fully persuaded that a believer, in the performance of duty, may be under the convincing and (in that sense) enlightening influence of the blessed Spirit, so that the poor man doth hate and loathe himself to a very great degree, yet may have but little comfort; nay, perhaps his very soul may be wounded with fear, lest he should be utterly cast away at last. Now though that doubting soul is certainly under the very necessary teachings of the Holy Spirit, and God is really present with him in duty; yet, properly speaking, he doth not enjoy God. It is one thing to be under the saving operations of the Holy Ghost, but another thing to enjoy or have fellowship with God. The enjoyment which our blessed Lord had at his baptism, and also on the mount where he prayed, differed much from that in the garden. And I doubt not but Paul's enjoyment in Acts ix. 11. differed considerably from his enjoyment, chap. xxii. 17. But I add no more, than that it may be your happy lot and mine to enjoy much of God now, and have the glorious vision and fruition hereafter.

QUEST. IV.

How may a person know, in the exercise of prayer, whether he is under the influence of the blessed Spirit, or, under the movings of his own natural spirit or imagination?

IT is undoubtedly the most excellent of all knowledge, for a man to be able to discern himself at all times, especially in our approaches to a sovereign God, before whose infinite majesty all the posterity of apostate Adam is less than nothing, and altogether vanity. This is a knowledge infinitely more refined in its nature, than that which distinguished ancient Greece, by the title of the *eye of the world*. A knowledge, not to be attained by drinking the pure streams of Castalio's fountain, retiring to the solitude of Parnassus, or climbing the heights of Helicon; not to be attained by attending at the feet of Gamaliel, either ancient or modern, human literature being unconnected therewith, though in itself no enemy, but a friend thereunto. This knowledge is attainable no where else but in the school of Christ, under the enlightening influences of his Spirit. By human instructions, human knowledge, and that alone, is attainable, for the streams can never rise higher than the fountain, but the knowledge of discerning spirits is in its nature divine, therefore must be the fruit of divine instructions.

According to the query, and 1 John iv. 6. the spirits by which every person is actuated, by the one or the other, are two, viz. the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. One or other of these presides over all the thoughts of the heart, the words of the mouth, and every action of the life of all the posterity of Adam—For I know no medium between truth and error, nothing indifferent in religion. As prayer is the matter under consideration, it behoves us to inquire when, in that exercise, a man may be said to be under the one, and when under the other? In answer thereunto, I have often observed, that in all, or most of the exercises of religion, there are three paths, viz. two extremes, and a middle term or path; these three paths engross all the professors of religion; the two extremes are under the direction of the spirit of error. One,

the name of which is the *middle path of judgment*, is reserved to the direction of the spirit of truth. We shall find this is nothing more than in the manner of prayer.

1. There are some people excessively afraid of formality in prayer; and there are others still, who, from a principle of mere negligence, utterly neglect premeditated prayer, equally with those who despise it from a principle of enthusiasm: these two kinds of people, under the influence of their own corrupt imagination, or a spirit of darkness and error, (call it which you will) are led into an extreme on the one hand; but on the other side, there are some, who, to avoid the errors which generally attend the precipitancy of the former, err as much on the other hand, and dare neither trust the dictates of their own hearts, nor the instructions of him by whom christians are taught to pray; but must have not only their matter and method premeditated, but their very sentences must be constructed by another, upon whose skilfulness they implicitly rely, and must have their rules before them in black and white. These are both of them extremes, and claim for their patron *the spirit of error*, which dealeth all in extremes.

But betwixt these two, if I mistake not, the path of judgment, in which the blessed Spirit doth lead his people, is found. I do not mean that if the Spirit of God doth not teach his people to rely upon the compositions of others, that he directeth them to precompose for themselves, though this, alas, is the modern custom; but that he leadeth them to preconsider the sense they have of the greatness, goodness, and wisdom of Jehovah, that when they come to address his throne, their verbal adorations of him, in these and all his other attributes, may not overrun their mental adoration of him. I mean, that he teacheth his people to preconsider their interest in and relation to God, that their external invocation of him may not express more confidence than their hearts are really possessed of.

For nothing bears a more hateful aspect, than the words *our Father*, in the mouths of such who deny that we can certainly know our adoption in time. I mean further, that the Holy Ghost leadeth his people to consider the sin they have to mourn over and confess, the blessings they, or the persons for whom they pray, do immediately want, the evils which they are to deprecate, the blessings for which they are to express their thankfulness, &c. Such premeditation, if I am not grossly ignorant, is the duty of every Christian, and a considerable part of the Spirit's instruction.

II. It is not always safe for a man to conclude that he is influenced by the Spirit of God, when he finds a fluency of words and freedom of utterance, for this doth very frequently proceed from natural causes, such as a happy position of the animal spirits—or from familiarity with the persons with whom we pray, especially if we are conscious that their gifts are inferior to our own; yea, if we only imagine so, it will answer the same end. For my own part, I have frequently found, that pride lurking in my heart hath been greatly concerned in my volubility; but the first, viz. the animal spirits having such a strong connexion with the mental faculties, as well as the organs of speech, are very much, yea, most of all concerned in our volubility in prayer. There are many well decorated orations made with great freedom of speech, adorned with a graceful utterance, prayerwise, when alas, the Spirit of prayer is not there, as would readily appear, if the orator would be so honest as to tell us the real disposition of his heart while in prayer; whether he viewed God or himself most; whether he considered the greatness of Jehovah, or the taste of the people with whom he prayed.

III. Nor is it safe for a man to conclude, that he is under the influence of the spirit of error, when in prayer he seems to be at a great distance from the favour of God. For it frequently happens, that a soul is never more under the influences of sanctifying grace, than when he seems in his own apprehension to be at the greatest distance.—But because I know all are not of my mind in this, I must beg of them, who think otherwise, to consider the case of Job, who, when he was nearest his enlargement, underwent the severest rebukes; and why not so with God's children in our days?—For my own part, without hesitation, I look on a *sense of* distance to be a great degree of nearness to God; a sense of deadness to be a goodly measure of life; a sense of barrenness in prayer to be a goodly sign of a soul fructified by grace. Very often the soul, in great seeming distance, is under the immediate influences of the Spirit of God, Isa. xlii. 16. especially if the person find any of the following tokens of the Spirit's presence.

1. Let a man or woman conclude themselves under the influences of the Holy Spirit in prayer, when in his approaches to the throne of grace, he is possessed of such a sense of the divine greatness of a prayer-hearing God, which sinketh him low in self-abasement, and so covereth him with a holy shame, that it is with some degree of confusion he lifteth up

his guilty eyes to the throne of infinite holiness. In such a case, creatures will be to him just nothing at all. In such a frame, swelling words of vanity, which infest not only our modern pulpits, but crowd into our christian meetings appointed for social prayer, will be strange to the person's tongue: there should be no verbal adorations, but what carry heart and soul in them.

2. When he is blest with a sense of nearness to God, and though, under a sense of the awfulness of the divine Majesty, he is enabled to admire that affinity of grace and goodness in God, which irradiates all his greatness, and endeareth his sovereignty unto us.—Then, with a profound awe and holy reverence, mixed with a becoming boldness and childlike confidence, he approaches the eternal throne, which he seeth sprinkled over with the atoning blood of the immaculate Jesus. In such a praying frame, shame will depart from the person, knowing that his business is with God.

3. When he hath such a sense of sin and deadness, that he can make little other confession thereof, but with sighs and groans, there is a great deal of the Spirit's influence in such a confession, though the person himself should not be able to utter one sentence. Yet there are many souls, who, for want of understanding to discern the spirits by which they are influenced, never think they pray by the Spirit's assistance, but when with pleasure they can fill up their usual time in freedom and utterance; but this is a distressing mistake. There is a vast difference between the Spirit and the gift of prayer. Let such precious souls observe, that words make up but a very small part in prayer. There is more persuasive eloquence in a single sigh or groan, forced from a sense of indwelling corruption, than in ten thousand well-constructed sentences without that sense: grammar and rhetoric are not essentials of prayer.

4. When there is such a sense of our wants, that all our petitions are thereby circumscribed, and by the rules prescribed by our necessities all our petitions are regulated; a person under the Spirit's influences dare ask no blessings but what he really knows he wants, either for himself or others for whom he prays.—All precipitation, levity, affectation, superfluous words, vain repetitions, and sometimes our elocutions, are the fruit of our own spirit, which may justly be called a spirit of darkness and error. But so is not all tautologies in prayer, for these frequently proceed from a fervency of spirit, with which only the Holy Ghost can inspire us.

As I am afraid I have already been too prolix, I dare add no more, only sum up what I have written, concluding, that if we are under the Spirit's influences, all our adorations will be ruled by the sense we have of his divine Majesty,—all our petitions by a sense of our wants,—all our thanksgivings by a sense of the mercies we are partakers of,—all our invocations of God will be ruled by the sense we either have, or desire to have, of our interest in, and relation to him, and our confessions by our sense of sin.

Another answer to the above question.

I APPREHEND, that the difference, as stated in the plan, may be considered in the manner of the operation or influence; the tendency of it, and the termination of it. Two things I take for granted, both which I think are indubitably evident. 1: That every believer, every heaven-born soul, is, by the divine work upon his heart, made to abhor every evil way, every sin; and yet he at the same time finds, almost, (at least) every sin working within him. And 2. That all believers, are in every thing liable to be actuated either by the blessed Spirit, the influence of good angels; or by their own evil imagination, and by the suggestions of Satan: so, consequently, Satan's methods with the wicked and the godly are very different: but it is only the believer which comes within the verge of our correspondent's plan; and to this I confine my thoughts.

1. As to the manner of the operation, I humbly apprehend, there is an apparent difference to an observing mind. The Spirit of God does not at any time debase the nobler power of the soul, the understanding, by attempting an entrance at the servile door of the affections; but honours himself, and the soul of man, by entering in at the beautiful gate, the everlasting door of the understanding; and so, in an alluring way, commands the compliance of the will and the affections, they will naturally follow; whereas the evil spirit comes as a thief, and is glad to get entrance at the servile door of the affections; working by the senses, on the imagination and fancy, and so the will is as it were dragged into a compliance, and the understanding is as it were darkened, and become a servant. Happy would it be if believers had a better understanding of themselves, and a greater and more constant guard over their affections.

The wise man directs to *keep the heart with all diligence*; and as to our senses, they are not to be trusted or indulged at

any time. David prayed that his eyes might be *turned away from beholding vanity*. A gazing on the creature gives the devil an opportunity to strike the fancy, and then our feet are soon gone. Again, the operations of the Spirit come with pureness and pleasure; the light in the understanding diffuseth itself through all the faculties. But Satan's influence, and that of our own hearts, as there is no light in it for the understanding, so there is no purity, peace, or pleasure, for the believer; but something painful and defiling. To transgress is a hard way; an unclean and troublesome way, Prov. xiii. the way in which transgressors choose to walk.

The operations of the Spirit, the influence of Satan, and the motions of our own hearts, are all, at times, very sudden, and something surprising; but the operations of the Divine Spirit, however sudden or surprising, they are always calm, pure, transforming and humbling, referring all unto the uninterrupted word. Whereas the motions of our own hearts, and Satan's suggestions, are always attended with something or other inconsistent with, and directly opposite to these. Oh, that those who have eyes to see, would but make use of them!

II. We may view the difference in the tendency of the one and the other.

1. The operation of the Spirit has an immediate and direct tendency to lead in the way of truth, and the way of truth is but one. It is the way of life, and that is above, Prov. xv. 24. above the reach of the natural man; it is the way everlasting, the way Jesus did walk in, the way which he himself is. But there are innumerable pernicious ways, which are directly contrary to truth; and Satan, and our own corrupt and deceitful hearts, are always moving of us, (when not prevented by sovereign grace) to walk in some one or other of them; so that we may know that we are moved either by Satan, or our own hearts, when it has a tendency to lead us in any other way (let it be approved of ever so much by men, yea, by good men) except the way of truth. Persuaded I am, the generality of believers, souls born again, in this degenerate age, are, in their general walk, actuated by the spirit of error; for though they have the Spirit of truth, which always abides in them, and they are often moved by it, yet they both grieve and quench it. Alas, are we not grown so very polite and rational (having so much outward liberty) that we are ready to conclude there is no need of, or room for the divine influence, except in some uncommon affairs, or extraordinary cases?

But with me it is evident, that the Spirit of God, by and with the written word, is the covenant blessing which the people of God should be waiting for, and living in the expectation of, to guide them through this wilderness, in respect of their natural, their civil, and religious conduct. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. In all our ways we are bid to acknowledge God; and till we are led to it, and to observe his secret operations, I do not expect to see the revival of the power of religion. But I leave the hint to the wise and considerate.

Another tendency of the divine Spirit's influence, is to promote the wisdom which is from above; for the Spirit is a spirit of wisdom; and the Apostle James, chap. iii. 17. gives us such a pathetic and familiar account of it, that all discerning persons may see, wherein, and when they are under the influence of the Divine Spirit; and under the movings of their own hearts, or the suggestions of Satan.

Again, another tendency of the Spirit of God, is to lead into glorious liberty; but what comes from Satan, and our own corrupt hearts; our own imagination tends to lead into bondage. How is the believing soul many times entangled with one lust and another! And do they not arise from Satan, or our own hearts? How is the poor saint pressed down with a sense of the guilt of sin! And consequently entangled with the power of it; and this too, after God spoke peace and pardon to him, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. And this pretended part of religion, like other temptations, shall be backed with scripture. But let the believer consider, that the Spirit of God is a Spirit of liberty, freeing from a sense of guilt, and in that view, in some measure, giving power to overcome sin. The devil does not love to see the believer walk in full assurance of faith, and therefore he takes all the methods he can to prevent it; and the believer had need have his eyes wide open to see the snare, when the devil turns himself into an angel of light. To war with spiritual wickedness in high places, we had need have on the whole armour of God. He that hath said to the believing soul, *Fear not, for I am thy God*, will never move him to fear afterwards; and may those who have felt the love of God in their hearts, start back, at the first motion they find to call it in question, as from the devil.

III. But the termination of the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of error, plainly speaks the difference. That which comes from God, cannot terminate in any thing short of God.

It is his glory the believer is led to aim at when under divine influence. The man is led out of himself; he is no longer his own. God is love! and that faith, which the operations of God do lead the soul to live by, always worketh by love. So, according to the degree and force of the operation, is the degree of love in which it terminates. Love is of God! and this will spread itself far and wide. See how the Apostle John has embellished (if I may so express myself) his epistles with the beauties of it, in the description he has given thereof; so that every believer (if not asleep) may at once discern what is of God, and what is not. Besides, I humbly apprehend, there is in every believer a certain criterion; a peculiar property in every saint, whereby he can distinguish truth from error better than the nicest logician, or the most exact critic. He that hath the new name in the white stone knows it, and none but himself can know it. Moreover, can any man appeal to any thing besides, or above the sun, to determine whether he sees the light of it or no? so, to what shall the believer appeal, but to the Spirit of God to determine for him? *It is in thy light we see light*, saith the Psalmist. And here I would only add, Peter's ready compliance to let down the net, Jeremiah's in hiding the girdle, and Abraham's in offering his son, can hardly comport and correspond with the maxims and conduct of the day; which is, I apprehend, to reason themselves into faith and obedience, contrary to the plain meaning of the Holy Ghost, 2 Cor. iv. 13. and hence I observe, poor trembling believers are kept low, and the vaunting orthodox goes on with ease.

QUEST. V. & VI.

Qu. 5. How far a child of God may fall, and yet have true grace in his soul?

Qu. 6. What is the essential difference between a natural and a spiritual faith?

IT is recorded by the Spirit of God (who best knew the mind of God, and by which the Prophets and Apostles spake,) *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*, Isa. i. 18. —Also in St. John i. 7. *and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin*. And again, *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men*, Matt. xii. 31. Now seeing there is no sin, be it ever so great, even blasphemy itself, though it reach unto heaven, yea, the most desperate of sins, murder even not excepted; yea, the most crimson sins, the blood of Christ is able to clean; yea, from sins like David's, whose sin was of the most complicated nature as could possibly be; yet the Lord suffered him not to lie in that backsliding way, but sent his Prophet to bring his sin to his remembrance. Peter is another striking picture of backsliding; yet the Lord left him not in the hand of Satan his enemy, but brought him back with weeping and supplication. But nevertheless, through his loving-kindness, he will never take from his children, yet he will visit their offences with the rod, and their sins with scourges. But to return to the question. It can therefore never be determined, how far a child of God may fall, do fall, or can fall, till we can determine what the sin against the Holy Ghost is. Now we may come a little at the nature of that sin, by the context of the chapter where it is spoken of. But to say to any man or men, you have sinned the unpardonable sin, is to go beyond the word of the Lord; and for any man to determine how far a man may sin before he commits that sin, would be to determine what the Lord himself puts out of the power of any finite creature; and he alone knows how far his children may fall, before they fall into that sin which shall never be pardoned, which none of the children of God ever did, or ever shall fall

into, because the oath and power of God is engaged to defend them from falling eternally. But there is one thing to be here noted, viz. That there is not one instance in all the book of God, wherein any of the children of God fell or committed any sin, that, upon being charged with it, ever cloaked it, or strove to make it appear as no sin; but, on the contrary, acknowledged it, and extolled the love of Jesus, who, through the Eternal Spirit, gave himself a ransom for the guilty; and those who through the sin they had contracted, by coming through the loins of their father Adam, and their own personal guilt, had brought condemnation and destruction (even everlasting) upon themselves. So that from the whole of what has been said on the first question, it plainly appears, that none but God can expressly determine, how far one of his children may fall. As to the latter clause, in the first question, it is also clear, that all the children of God have the true grace of God in the soul, and shall never lose it, whether they stand or whether they fall, though their falls shall be to their shame, and the hurt of their own conscience here, as well as to the dishonour of the cause they espouse. These few hints, I hope, will satisfy on the first question.

As to the second, there need be very little said upon the clearing of it, though the point itself is the main point wherein every man living is nearly concerned, viz. Whether his faith is natural or spiritual? I say, This is the main point and inquiry of every seeking soul, who has in the lowest degree tasted that the Lord is gracious, but is still (through weakness and infirmity) unable to see his title to the kingdom of God by Christ Jesus. Well then, how are we to know the difference, or rather, what is the real difference? They are undoubtedly some of these following hints:

I. A natural faith, though ever so high, trusts not in Jesus Christ for righteousness. But on the contrary, a spiritual faith, or the faith of God's elect, is on a God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

II. He that is only possessed of a natural faith, trusts in his doing what he can, and so in Jesus, as he says for the rest; but he that has a spiritual faith, wholly trusts to Jesus, and not to himself, in whole, or in part. But the main difference lies here.

III. The heart is not changed, nor the man as yet justified, and therefore *he that believeth not, is condemned already*, &c. John iii. 18. but in the same verse, *he that believeth on him, is not condemned*. Now we know that he that believeth is

likewise justified, not on account of his faith as an act, but he is justified by the blood of Christ, brought home to the conscience by the Spirit of God through faith, it being the hand (if I may so speak) which lays hold of the atonement.—But again,

IV. As there is no change of soul wrought by the Spirit of God, so there is no love of God: neither indeed can there be, seeing they were never convinced, and so never knew of a deliverance, which is the spring of love; for, saith one Apostle, *we love him, because he first loved us*: but the believer loves God, and all his obedience proceeds from a principle of love which is sealed in his heart, and from which all his works proceed as from a fountain.

V. and *lastly*. Though in outward appearance a man with natural faith may actually appear as upright in the sight of men (I do not say it is always so) as the most spiritual believer, and live as upright (with respect to conscientious living), but here lies the main point,—he, at the best, only acts as Paul did before his conversion; for he cannot say, as Peter from a *felt* sense of the love of God, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*. Now, this, he that hath a spiritual faith, can truly say; and the Lord can likewise say, yea, and doth still say, as of old, *behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*.

The main difference then is clear, I hope, from these few hints, I mean the scripture difference; but there is one thing further to observe, viz. That the believer, though he falls daily, his views are always fixed and centered in Jesus, that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, which he knows must cleanse him, or he must perish; he has repentance given to him, which need not to be repented of: but if the natural man's conscience begins to trouble him, he flies (not to the blood of Christ for relief, but) to something he calls repentance or amendment of life; but all this time he knows not what repentance is, he considers not that repentance unto life is a change of heart wrought by the Spirit of God, and is the gift of God.

QUEST. VII.

How may a person distinguish between the genuine consolations of the gospel, wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God, and those comforts that spring from our own imagination, or a delusive spirit?

AN important query indeed ! a query that ought to be well weighed, in this age of carnal security on the one hand, and fatal delusion on the other. The question is not to be solved by any mortal, to the believer's full satisfaction. The divine Teacher is the infallible casuist. Nevertheless, as the holy Spirit condescends to smile sometimes upon weak attempts to answer doubts that lie heavy upon the hearts of his beloved ones, and we are commanded to comfort his people, and particularly the feeble-minded, to such the following thoughts are humbly presented.

By *consolations* and *comforts* in the query, I shall understand *ease, quietness, and satisfaction*, regarding our present and eternal state, so as to produce joy and gladness.

The query itself denotes that *genuine consolations are wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God*. I shall endeavour first to point out this genuine work, begun and carried on by the God of all solid comfort. Let it be well noted that this consolation is wrought only in mourners; yet not all mourners; for Christ came to comfort those that mourn in Zion. They have been enlightened to see that sin is beyond all expression sinful; their heart is wounded with a sense of their own vileness; their sorrow for sin is after a godly manner. Being often so loaded with guilt, they are afraid lest it should sink them to the nethermost hell; they refuse to be comforted; for *a wounded spirit, who can bear?* There are different degrees of sorrow, and so there are of comfort. The holy Spirit wounds before he heals, bringeth low before he lifteth up, even to the dunghill, before he setteth upon the throne; nay, sometimes, to the gates of hell, before he leads to the borders of heaven. Now when the blessed Spirit doth administer comfort to those he hath made sorrowful, he will always direct them to Christ, as the very fountain-head, spring, and source, of all true joy. He will display the riches of Christ, his ability

and willingness to save even to the uttermost; he will never fail to glorify the Redeemer. Not only the believer's first comfort and peace is derived from Christ; but all after-consolations, that are solid, abound by Christ. It is joy and peace in believing. This peace sometimes flows in like a river; it passeth all understanding, saith the great Apostle. It proceeds from him who said, *My peace I give unto you*. This inexpressible tranquillity is communicated sometimes by the powerful and evident application of a particular, and remarkably suitable promise, that at once answereth all doubts, and effectually scattereth the clouds; yet it is not impossible for this joy to be grounded upon the whole scope of the gospel, taking the promises collectively together, as centering in Christ. At certain seasons this peace and joy in the Holy Ghost may be in much assurance; but it may not be so always. Let the degree of this consolation be high or low, its fruits and effects have the same tendency. Where it is happily enjoyed, it doth wonderfully evacuate and cleanse the heart of pride, self-conceit, levity, &c. Faith in exercise doth always accompany this inward serenity; so it hath a peculiar tendency to mortify sin, for it is the very earnest and foretaste of heaven itself, and the more of heaven the less of sin. As the comfort flows from Christ, the believer will certainly attribute the whole of his salvation to his dear and exalted Redeemer. To behold the fulness of Christ by a weak faith, will seldom fail to yield some degree of consolation, which will be like oil to the wheel of obedience: the person will run with joy the way of God's commandments, though the whole world should be against him; *the joy of the Lord is his strength*. Such as walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, will walk in the fear of the Lord. If we rejoice in the Lord always, let our moderation, meekness, and holiness, be known unto all men. I am fully persuaded that these and their kindred fruits are, without any peradventure, found wherever the true comforter doth work under that character. The comfort of the Holy Ghost cannot be where the fruit of the Spirit is not. Yet even in a true believer I question not but comforts may spring from his own imagination or a delusive spirit. These comforts will not fail to produce corrupt fruit. Instead of melting, it will harden the heart, filling it with pride and vanity, not with humility and gravity. They will cause the wheel of obedience to run heavily, whether it respects private devotion or public worship; the general conduct also will be more lax and careless, for the conversation will not be more in heaven. The

person will be more prompted to an offensive and sinful *self-seeking*, than to a savoury and holy *self-denial*. He will be carried away more by sense than by faith; and in many parts of his conduct he will imitate an unbeliever, rather than bear the image of his holy Redeemer. We should beware of imaginary and delusive consolations, as much as we should pray for those that are genuine. The former will certainly dishonour the gospel, but the others adorn it. How many are there, who are altogether in a state of nature and destitute of saving grace, yet have their imaginary and delusive comforts. Pagans, Mahometans, Jews, the most ignorant of the Papists, and all gross idolaters have their devotion, and, no doubt, their imaginary comfort. The ignorant Protestant, who knows little more of real Christianity than a Hottentot, probably may imagine that God will not be so unmerciful as to cast him into everlasting torments, so he hath some delusive comfort. I have the same opinion of Deists, and other self-righteous and self-confident gentlemen, who so swarm in our age, and set so light by the blood of the everlasting covenant. May the Lord open their eyes, and forgive them, for they know not what they do, any more than their brethren who cried, *Away with him! away with him!* Likewise the Antinomian, who boasteth so much of the blood and righteousness of Christ, but withal doth wallow in sin, and bring forth no fruit meet for repentance: his delusions are exceeding strong and dangerous.

It evidently appears, by these hints, that we ought carefully to examine our comforts. Our Lord's maxim is very good in many cases, *By their fruit ye shall know them*. The more we are acquainted with divine consolations, the easier, and clearer we shall discover those that are false, either in ourselves or others.

QUEST. VIII.

Why should the king of Moab, by the advice of his privy council, in a time of imminent danger and threatening distress, apply for relief to a Prophet of the God of Israel, as Balaam certainly was, and not to Baal Peor, the God of the Moabites?

BALAAM's character is set out in the query so favourably, that a stranger to the Bible might easily imagine him to be a true Prophet; for he is not only supposed, but asserted to be, a *Prophet of the God of Israel*: but the scripture informs us that he was a *soothsayer*, and that he *sought for enchantments*. In the following texts we may see what sort of persons soothsayers and enchanters were, Ex. vii. 11, 22. Deut. viii. 10, 11. 2 Kin. xvii. 17. Jer. xxvii. 9. Mic. v. 12. Acts viii. 9, 11. and xiii. 6. and xvi. 16. with other parallel places. It will be said that "he had free access to God upon several occasions." I cannot find any hint of that in scripture, but only in the case before us. True we find here, that the Lord spake to him often, yet, even in this remarkable affair, we see, he *sought for enchantments*; but when he found, after repeated attempts, there was no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel, but they were to a miracle, preserved of God, it is said, *He went not as at other times, to seek for enchantments*. This seems to suggest, that at each of the former times he used enchantments, or devilish arts; and it is probable that every time he sought the Lord, he used those very sinful arts.

If it be queried, How the Lord condescended to reveal his will to such a person? The matter appears to me thus: Balaam was a man of great fame, much such another as Simon Magus, and had a very artful way of deceiving the people; so they thought certainly, that whom he blessed, was blessed; and whom he cursed, was cursed. It is plain, that his aim was to amass riches, and not to instruct the people in the will of God. The messengers sent from Balak, took the rewards of divination in their hands; for he loved, and ran greedily after, the wages of unrighteousness. In the whole account of the affair, it is evident, that he was desirous to go and curse

Israel; for he said, the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you. As he now was earnestly solicited, and willing to go and curse the peculiar people of God, I am persuaded that there was an eminent divine interposition, so that he was under special restraints from the Almighty, and obliged, against his inclination, to bless, and not to curse Israel. For it seems he entreated leave to curse them; for it is said, *The Lord would not hearken unto Balaam, but turned the intended curse into a blessing.* I do not think he was ever under divine inspiration but only upon this notable occasion; and that by an evident and wonderful interposition of God in favour of his people.

We have other instances of this kind. When Laban, Balaam's countrymen, both being Syrians, pursued after Jacob, intending to hurt him, God came to him and said, *Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob, either good or bad.* Let it be here observed, that Laban saith, *The God of your father spake unto me.* Here he disowns the God of Abraham, and does not look upon him as his God; yet he durst not, at this time, go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do good or bad, any more than Balaam could: and Jacob knew the reason of it; for, said he, *except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty; God hath seen my affliction, and the labour of my hand, and rebuked thee yesternight.* Gen. xx. 3, &c. and 1 Sam. xix. 22, &c. are not foreign to our present purpose.

That Balaam was not one of the holy men of God, will appear, if we consider, that notwithstanding he could not possibly curse, but evidently bless Israel, he yet did all in his power to hurt them; for by his counsel he taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before Israel; and the Midianites, being by him instructed, vexed them with their wiles, and at last beguiled them, so as to prevail upon them to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication, which corrupted the people, and brought the plague among the congregations of the Lord. Had he been a *true* Prophet of the God of Israel, he would not have taken this method. But when vengeance is brought upon the Midianites, for following the council of Balaam, it falls also upon the head of the Prophet; whose iniquity and madness the dumb ass rebuked and forbad in time. Thus as he lived a wicked life, so he died the death of the wicked, and not of the righteous.

It does not appear to me that Balak applied to Balaam, because he believed him to be a Prophet of the God of Israel;

but only because he took him to be a very famous practitioner, as a soothsayer and enchanter. If Balak had regard to any deity in this point, I think it must be to Baal Peor; for as soon as Balaam came, he is taken to the high places of Baal, and after that to the top of Peor. That Balaam was no great enemy to Baal Peor, appears by his manner of sacrificing upon seven altars, upon the high places of Baal, and on the top of Peor. I am of opinion, that neither Naaman the Syrian, nor his master, had the least design to change their deity in coming to Elisha; but I suppose they took him to be something like a great soothsayer, as Daniel is called by a heathen king, *master of the magicians*; so a grand present is brought to Elisha, but the true Prophet was not very greedy of filthy lucre. It is true, when the cure was done, Naaman's heart was so affected, that he entertained very favourable thoughts of the God of Israel; but still he was resolved to bow in the house of Rimmon.

The conclusion of the whole is this: Balaam's character will hardly admit him to be ranked among the Prophets of the God of Israel; and as Balak does not seem to me, in the least inclined to consult another deity, I see not how he can affront Baal Peor; nay, he pays him divine honour and homage, in building him so many altars upon his high places, by the direction and assistance of Balaam; then it is easy to conclude that assistance and protection, aid and succour is earnestly entreated of Baal Peor at this time of distress. And when all failed, the soothsayer at last puts Balak in a way to bring Jacob over to the idol of Moab; for *Israel joined himself to Baal Peor*; neither was the people soon cleared of his sin; for a good while after, it is said, *Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord?* As for the truths which Balaam spoke, concerning Israel and other nations, I believe it was to show Balak, and his Prophet, how effectually God could turn the curse into a blessing, and found them both. He seems to tremble at his own prophecy, when he said, *Alas! who shall live when God doth this?* Caiaphas was no great friend to our Lord Jesus Christ, yet he prophesied great truths concerning Christ and his people.

QUEST. IX.

How far should the master of a family concern himself about the eternal salvation of his children, servants, &c. Is it his duty to read a portion of the Scripture to them, morning and evening, and pray with them as often? Should he catechise or ask them pertinent questions, at proper seasons?

AN important query, tending to excite, and stir up to a duty much neglected within the pale of the Christian church, and that by many whose profession runneth very high. When vital religion, or the power of godliness is upon the decline, as it is lamentably so at this day, those branches of practical godliness are almost the first that are neglected. One who is not very well acquainted with the professing part of mankind, but hath, nevertheless, a just sense of the forcible principles of humanity, would be apt to think it impossible for a parent (who is himself acquainted with the heinous nature of sin, the impartial justice of God, and the vanities of bewitching earth,) to be careless about the eternal salvation of his children. Yet, with grief, we see numbers of professing parents, though in every respect as careful as any man, for the training up of their children in the modish fashions of the times, and the procuring fortunes for them, against the time they shall dispose of them in marriage, who, at the same time, appear to be indolent enough in that great part of a parent's duty, "The inculcating moral principles upon the minds of their children." A practice which ought to be early begun, continued in, with prayer and perseverance; the neglect of which may, perhaps, be one visible reason, why some Christians find such intolerable crosses from the conduct of their upgrown children. The laws of nature force an obligation upon parents, to care for the happiness of their children, even as they consult their own. Solomon points man to the diminutive ant, from its conduct to learn instruction, in point of industry and frugality. After his example, I think I may, without prejudice to truth, say, "O ye inhuman parents, who feel little or no concern for the eternal welfare of your children! go to the beasts of the

field, and from them learn a lesson of parental care." Their highest sense of happiness is present sensation, and how careful are they that the happiness of their young be the same, both in species and measure, with their own! See the maternal hen; she prefers the safety and happiness of her young, to that of herself. Now though I do not intend to act the naturalist with you, yet from the observation before us, a sharp reproof is given to you, who yourselves have tasted the sweetness of religion, and neglect obedience to that natural obligation, to do all that lies in your power, if, by any means, your instructions, under the Lord's blessing, may be instrumental in rendering the happiness of your children the same in kind with your own. Now, as we are not mere naturalists, but profess ourselves Christians, we have a sure and certain rule whereby to govern our conduct. To the law, and to the testimony, therefore let us go; for as many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be on them, &c. and herein we find some things as indispensably required of parents in behalf of their children.

1. Diligently to lead them into the Christian system of morality. There are three means which God hath instituted, and on which his blessings may be expected, in order to the attaining of this.

1. *The restraining them from immoral practices, 1 Sam. iii. 12, 13, 14. In that day, I will perform against Eli, all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice for ever: And in ch. iv. we see the awful fulfilling of this denunciation of wrath. The ark of God was taken; Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were slain; Eli hears the dismal tidings, falls from his seat and breaks his neck; the wife of Phinehas falls into labour, and dies in childbearing. Thus swift destruction to an eminent family in Israel was procured by the sinful indulgence of a tender father, who, in other respects, was a very good man. This is a warning given for professing parents, in latter times, that they may be aware, and avoid the judgments that good men fell under. As to the manner of restraint, it is threefold. First, Cautioning of them against every known sin, of which the forecited scripture is proof sufficient. Secondly, Reproof of their errors, which is much recommended by the wise Solo-*

mon, in a variety of his proverbial texts; especially Prov. xxix. 15, 17. *The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame, &c.* Not such lifeless reproofs as that of Eli, *Nay, my sons, for it is no good report I hear of you.* A far sharper rebuke may come from as tender a heart as old Eli's. *Thirdly*, The rod of correction, as Prov. xiii. 24. *He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.* And ch. xix. 18. *Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.* And ch. xxiii. 13, 14. and xxix. 17, &c.

2. The second institution, on which the divine blessing may be expected, is *instruction*, Ps. lxxviii. 1—9. *I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and such as our fathers have told us; we will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come, the praises of the Lord, &c.* It is, doubtless, the incumbent duty of parents, as far as possible, to set before their children what is in itself morally good, or morally evil; and to prohibit the one by threatening, and by precepts enjoin the other, Gen. xviii. 18, 19. *Abraham shall surely become a mighty nation, &c. For I know him that he will command the children of his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.* And Deut. vi. 6, 7. *And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children.* Nothing, I think, appears more rationally to be the parent's duty, therefore I proceed to mention the

3d. A *holy example*. Neither threatening reproof nor precept is likely to be of much service, if this be wanting, 1 Tim. iii. 4. *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity, or holiness.* And Eph. vi. 4. *And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* Parents may provoke their children to wrath, or ungodliness, by bad example, as well as otherwise; but this I need not to insist on, for none will deny this branch of duty.

II. The second duty of a parent is, to enforce upon the minds of their young ones, the literal knowledge of the principles of religion, as you may see from Prov. xxii. 6. *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* Any one, I presume, will allow, that scriptural and orthodox principles of religion, are not the slightest part of that way spoken of, but rather the principal thing intended. But further, to strengthen the proposition,

let me point you to Deut. xi. 18, 19. *Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your hearts and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes; and ye shall teach them your children; speaking of them when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* That was, doubtless, a well-governed family in which Timothy was educated; for he is said to know the scriptures from a child, 2 Tim. iii. 15. It can hardly be imagined, that the knowledge of the scriptures grew spontaneously in the mind of the child Timothy, without the application of his good mother's diligence in instructing of him. Yea, it is laid down as an express institution, in the above-cited, Deut. xi. 19, that we teach our children the knowledge of the scriptures, and of the principles of religion, immediately founded upon the word. And, for my own part, I have had great reason to bless God, that my parents knew it to be their duty to observe what is thus divinely appointed; for the knowledge of the scriptures, &c. which I attained by their careful instructions, in my infancy, was the first and principal means of my convictions, both of sin, and my utter danger by it; and of the grace of God, and my interest therein. And since my first experimental acquaintance with the person, grace, and righteousness, of the ever-adorable Jesus, the scripture and knowledge thereof, have been as bulwarks to defend me against the abounding, grace-depreciating errors of the age, in which it hath pleased God to cast my lot. This knowledge of the principles of divine truth, is best attained by the children, where there is,

1. The word daily read in the family. David delighted in the law, or word of God, and made it his daily study, which could not be done, without reading of it; and, if David himself had such veneration for the word, we are well assured he would recommend it to the love and study of his household; for it would argue a parent worse than a barbarian, who, having found a goodly treasure himself, will not suffer the children of his loins to partake with him. The neglecting this part of a parent's duty, is a forbidding little children to come to Jesus Christ; but because there is no absolute command, which, in express terms, enjoins the word to be read evening and morning, people of carnal minds, are too apt to shuffle it off from being a duty. Surely these words, *Thou shalt speak of them when thou risest up, and when thou liest down*, have emphasis enough laid upon them to enforce the

practice. What can Paul mean, Eph. vi. 4. by training up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Surely he must intend an inuring of them to all the means of instruction, to godliness in principle and in practice. Reading of God's word, is a part of instituted worship; and God is to be worshipped in all the families of his people, Jer. xxxi. 1. And, if reading the word is a part of religious worship, consequently it ought to be read daily; for God is to be worshipped daily. The Bereans are said to be more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the scriptures daily, Acts xvii. 11.

2. Where catechising of the young ones is maintained, which is either stated or occasional, there ought to be certain seasons, inviolably appointed, to that great purpose; without which, the usual reading of the word is not likely to have the same success; and, blessed be the Lord, we have many excellent helps, published for this purpose, which, with the many occasional opportunities parents have of putting such pertinent questions to their children, or servants, may prove very beneficial. This ought to be much recommended to parents, especially to mothers, who have more of these opportunities than we can expect a father, engaged in business, to have. O! how happy were it for our uprising generation, if less time were spent in decking and adorning the bodies of their children, and more pains taken to impress upon their minds, a sense of the great things of moral and divine religion. I would not have any one to think, that I suppose it in the parent's power to give their children the saving grace of God, without which all other things are insufficient to bring them to glory; but I am sure that consistent principles taught them, can never be a hinderance of their receiving that grace; and, when received, makes it shine with greater lustre.

III. Praying with and for our children, is indispensably necessary; and that in the family, as well as in private, Jer. x. 25. *Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name.* Here is a dreadful curse upon prayerless families, and O that it were well understood and feared! I must acknowledge, it is with difficulty; that I can persuade myself, that any master of a family, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, can, upon any account whatever, neglect that natural duty of family worship, which to me appears to be the glory of a family. To be instrumental of bringing children into the world, and not to solicit the Almighty in their behalf, doth argue us worse

than infidels. Which way shall children, or servants, be taught to know that prayer is a part of natural religion, which all men owe unto God, if parents and masters of families deny them the privilege of joining with them therein. I well know, that human instruction can never teach them that prayer is the privilege of God's saints. But, sure we ought to distinguish between the peculiar privilege of saints, and that which is a moral and natural obligation upon all men. The latter may well be inculcated, both by example and precept, without infringing upon the liberties of the other. David, in Ps. lv. 17. tells us, that *evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice.* I would recommend to the Christian reader, the three sermons preached by Mr. *Matthew Henry* from this text. This resolution of David's, beateth down that asylum which people so often fly to for shelter, against condemnation for the neglect of family prayer; I mean the hurry of business: for any man who knows the world, knoweth very well that no man hath more business on his hand, and less time to spare, for either reading the word, or prayer, than a prince, who hath the uncommon weight of national concerns upon him. But the truth is, and I fear not to speak it, that when hurry of business causeth neglect of family worship, it betrayeth a heart engrossed by the world, and little, if any love at all to God in it. See Dan. vi. 10. *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.* By what follows in the succeeding verse, it is evident that it was verbal family prayer, which he exercised himself in, Josh. xxiv. 13. *But as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.* From these texts of scripture, observe, *first*,—David cried aloud, which people seldom do in closet prayer; therefore, it appears likely that family prayer was maintained thrice a day in his house. And Daniel's prayer was such, that people that stood without doors, could hear supplications; and this was the cause of his being cast into the lion's den. *Secondly*, Joshua resolves not for himself only, but for his whole house, or family; Abraham-like, he commanded his house to follow his example: and I do not believe any body will venture to say, that Joshua worshipped not God in his family. As masters of families are invested with power sufficient to command children and servants to attend the worship of God in the family, I know not how parents can

justify their neglect of it. There is a remarkable instance of the acceptance of family prayer, in the case of Cornelius, the centurion, Acts x. 30. But I proceed,

IV. To observe the expedience of habituating children, when yet young, to all the branches of external religion. Nothing, with greater propriety can be called the way of the Lord than this: this is what Paul means by nurture, and what ought not to be neglected. Hence we see parents ought to command their children, and servants to attend on public worship where the word of God is powerfully preached, and where the ordinances are regularly administered. Parents ought to make conscience, how either children or servants spend the day of the Lord, and lay such necessary restraints, or give such encouragements, as the case requires.

All that hath been said in regard to children, holds good in the case of servants; and, if any should doubt of it, I appeal to that memorable precept given by our Lord, *Do unto others the same things that you would wish others to do unto you*, Mat. vii. 12. Now let masters lay this rule of equity to heart, and ask themselves: Would you be willing that your children should live with masters who take no care of their souls? I know you would not. Then why should you act in such a manner; careless whether your servants honour God or not, provided they do their business? Doth it not indicate that such masters are mercenary and base? Is it a sign that they love the Lord with all their heart, and delight in his service? Doth it not evidence their disregard to divine precepts? Their love to the world? their ignorance of the value of immortal souls? Likewise the inconsistency there is betwixt their practice and profession? May not poor Christian parents insert into their prayers—From such masters, good Lord, preserve our children!

QUEST. X.

Is it possible for a person to be regenerated, or born again, and yet, for many years after, fear he is not? And may a person no way doubt of his regeneration, and at the same time be an unconverted person?

IF we consider the mental circumstances of the person regenerated, that there are yet the remains of sin and unbelief abiding with him, and that the best are much clouded with ignorance, as well as liable to the bewildering temptations of deceitful friends; we need not think it impossible for a regenerate person to be afraid that he never experienced that gracious work upon his mind. It is observable, that some of Jehovah's most eminent saints have been left, and that in their last distress, to call in question the truth of their interest in Christ, and consequently their regeneration. That eminent saint and minister of Christ, the Rev. Mr. Ralph Erskine, late of Dunfermline, (of precious memory to the church, whose *Sonnets and Sermons* will be dear to the saints, while both exist on the earth; and, notwithstanding some defects, such as attend the best of human compositions, do fully demonstrate his skill in the Spirit's work, in regeneration and sanctification; likewise his doctrinal acquaintance with the person, grace, and righteousness of Christ; add unto this his eminent usefulness in the work of the ministration of the word) when he came to a deathbed, was left in such deep desertion, that all his friends who attended on, or visited him, could not persuade him from that melancholy reflection, "*That after he had preached to others, he himself was become a cast-away;*" and in this sad and mournful condition he continued, till his friends thought him past speaking: then, when least expected, he lifted up his withered hands, and clapt them thrice, shouting, Victory! —Victory!!—Victory!!! I also find that other northern worthy, Samuel Rutherford, in his *Letters*, expressing his fears, lest he was but half a christian, or such another as king Agrippa, an almost-christian; but I have never heard these men's Christianity called in question, till eagle-eyed Sandeman arose, who, I doubt not, would find many faults with Paul, or Peter,

were they preachers cotemporary with himself. I could name many instances of the like nature, but those two shall suffice, being men esteemed by all the orthodox.

My friend and neighbour Camillus is a good man, of exemplary piety, and good understanding in the mysteries of truth, and zealous for the honour of that God whose cause he professeth; yet I often find him under downcastings: it was the other day I went to visit him, and found him sitting alone, very pensive, in his parlour. After mutual salutation, without using any of the modern formalities, so graceful in the esteem of some, I inquired into the cause of his dejection. To which he told me, that he had been a professor of religion for these twenty years past, and oftentimes thought he had reason to believe that he was called by grace according to the purpose of God; but that now, he found himself incapable of believing that ever he had any grace at all. I immediately found my soul to fellow-feel with my friend, and offered what advice I thought most proper, intermixed with some portions of sacred writ for the removal of his doubts. I expatiated upon the usefulness of adapting our present frame to some suitable portion of scripture; such as, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, &c. And from thence, drawing such a rational conclusion as he was best enabled, till the Lord, the Spirit, should be pleased to make his witness more visible. To which he replied, So very manifest to me, have been the past changes of both the frame of my mind, or the bent of my inclinations, and the general tenor of my life, that, could I always believe the veracity of the scriptures, I should never doubt of my interest in the promises therein contained; for I very well see the character of Christ's sheep, as there described, and see my own spots to be of the same colour with theirs. But, alas, such is my unbelief, I cannot receive the Scriptures as the word of God!

I told him, that I thought it was impossible for any reasonable person who believed that there is a God, to resist the evidence of the divinity of the scriptures of both Testaments, and here enumerated proofs thereof. To which he replied, What you say is true; but it is a hard matter, sometimes, to believe that there is any God at all. I then told him, that I did not think it possible for any man to take a view of the creation, and at the same time to say, that there is no God; our reason itself being a strong advocate for the existence of a Deity. Then he bid me to consider, that there may be certain seasons in the

Christian's life, wherein his reason may be overpowered by temptation and sin; and for a proof thereof, he pointed out Isa. lix. 19. where it is said, *When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.* Which portion of scripture, added to what I have formerly experienced, on some cloudy days, convinced me of the truth of my friend's doctrine; for if the enemy comes in as a flood, then of necessity he must bear all down before him,—our graces, and our evidences of those graces. A flood carries all before it,—houses, trees, &c. and if he, for a season, is permitted to bear down or suppress our graces, why may not his licence reach the understanding, and our reasoning faculties? If this is granted, as I think it cannot be denied, it is very accountable why some Christians, of extensive knowledge and sanctity, find themselves ill set (at certain times) to keep clear of the whirlpool of atheism; and likewise accounts for a regenerate person being liable to those fears noted in the query.

One very fruitful nurse to those opposites of faith, is our too much reliance on the Spirit's work within us, and our neglecting his word and testimony, as contained in the Bible: here a man may miss his way so far, that the very things which evidence grace in us, may be made a ground for such fears; and I believe are frequently so used.

For instance, a discovery of the secret abominations of the heart, and our helplessness to deliver ourselves from such inbred vermin, for the most part, is what our fears do least spring from; whereas if our eye was fixed on *thus saith the Lord in his word*, although we could never be joyful, purely, because these abominations dwell in our heart; yet we both could and would rejoice, that the Lord had discovered them to us. It is a certain proof that God hath been here, when his light shines into our darkness, which only can manifest our darkness unto us: it is his grace alone can show to us the depravity of our nature. However great the attainments of a hypocrite may be, he can never be capable of mourning over his natural propensity to sin, through the depravity of the whole man; and by the way, I apprehend the regenerated person mourns more over this, than all his actual transgressions. Now a word to the latter part of the query, *viz. And may a person no way doubt of their regeneration, and yet be an unconverted man.*

This I would say, He may. There are three distinct classes of men, who doubt not at all of their regeneration;

and yet they are all unconverted: these are the notionalists, the legalists, and the profane rabble.

The notionalist is, perhaps, at as great a distance from salvation, by the works of the law, as any body; and, it may be, he is as zealous for gospel-truths as any in the neighbourhood: and, having those good qualities, one would be apt to say, What lacks he yet? the answer is, He lacks every thing of value. He is like the man who hath read navigation, but never was at sea; he hath the theory, but not the practical part: yet he who hath got the theory of sailing, reckons himself as well skilled, as the man who hath sailed round the world. The notions, alas! float all in the brain, without descending into the heart.

It is now many years, that *Sententius* hath sat under an orthodox ministry, that now he hath learned the theory of the gospel by rote, he can pray with great propriety of speech, for half an hour together in company; but not in private, unless he is apprized that somebody is watching him. He will contend vigorously for gospel-truths, provided it do not clash with his interest; he will talk with you for a day on certain subjects; but if you fall into the work of the Holy Spirit upon the mind, or inward holiness, you tie his tongue at once, and presently may discern an uneasiness attend him. You may talk against sin in general, as long as you will, he will join you; but if you happen to hit the right nail on the head, and pierce his beloved lust, then he and you differ, otherwise he is silent. He can converse with you, this hour, upon divine subjects; the next hour he is fit company for any body, let their discourse be what it will. If it is profane, he can bear it without affecting his heart; if it is any way tolerable, he will join with them in it. He would not swear an oath upon any account; but he can hear another swear without being over-disturbed. He will not get fuddled neither; but he can sit with drunkards, and drink as much as they upon occasion. And yet this man has no more doubts about his regeneration, than the strongest Christian in Britain. He takes it for granted that the knowledge of the doctrines is regeneration; and indeed, so it is, providing it be a sanctified knowledge: but his knowledge, alas! is barely speculative. The various doctrines dwell in a confused mass, as so many mingled phantoms in his brain; and, phantom-like, have no weight at all, either upon his heart or conversation.

Legalus, his next neighbour, is quite opposite to him, in regard to sentiments; so that they can never agree. *Sententius*

takes his speculation for the fruits of regeneration; *Legalus* takes his goodness for the same thing, and despiseth the notions of *Scutentius* in the same manner that he despiseth the works of *Legalus*. For, you must know, *Legalus* is a constant attender on the word preached, and the sacrament, and is very devout at both; besides, he maintaineth family-worship, and says many long prayers by himself; and, to perfect the matter, he feeds the hungry, and sometimes clothes the naked: add unto these his negative holiness,—he never wrongs any man, never was drunk, never swore an oath in his life; and all the comfort he desires, when he comes to die, is, that he may have nothing to do, but to look back and take a view of his well-spent life. Now, all these good things being summed up together, who would not be blamed for saying, that *Legalus* is but an almost Christian? It is true he thinks himself a good Christian, and that of a better rank than the most! but I will, at all events, assert that he hath no Christianity in him, and prove it from his motives and proposed ends; and every body may know, that it is the end which crowns the work.

The love of Christ constrains Christians to obedience; but it is self-love which constrains *Legalus* to these his religious acts. If he were sure that he could always live in this world, they might be religious who would for him, for he would not, unless, with Jehu, he found his account in it; or, if he were assured that he could escape hell when he dies, he would not care much whether he get heaven or not. A separation from the joys of heaven at death, being inseparably joined with the torments of hell, *Legalus* is obliged to stir himself, in order to escape that which he is afraid of: thus the fear of hell is what oils the wheels of his obedience, and he hath no eye to the glory of God, nor the good of his fellow-creatures, in any of his duties, moral or religious, but merely to save himself from the vengeance of eternal fire: he believes he could not live so holy, as his fancy tells him he does, if he were not regenerated.

Vitiamor lives in the same street with these two men, and is an utter enemy to both of them. He hates the notions of *Scutentius*, equally as he does the deeds of *Legalus*. You may meet with *Vitiamor* in the exercise of every sin, and yet he does not so much as once question the goodness of his heart, or even his regeneration.

Now let those three men know, that their pretended faith is no more than a fahey. Their hope is rotten at heart, and will perish in a trying day, however confident they are now, as

to all being well with them. To conclude, I cannot but wonder, that any person who denies the popish doctrine of Christian persecution, should be so inconsistent with themselves as to tell us, that an uninterrupted assurance of interest in the love of God, is essential to true faith.

The assurance of faith, is either a grace of the Spirit, or it is not: if it is not a grace of the Spirit, it cannot be essential to Christianity: if it is a grace of the Spirit, and an uninterrupted degree, essential to Christianity, by parity of reason, an uninterrupted humility, self-denial, resignation, love, repentance, and heavenly-mindedness, (for these are likewise graces of the Spirit,) are essential to Christianity; and then to talk of growing in grace, would be nonsense. For if one grace or virtue may be perfect, what reason can be assigned why the rest may not? But, whilst you and I are in the body, we shall find our faith interrupted with unbelief; our hope with fear; our love with carnal enmity; and every other grace with its opposite.

QUEST. XI.

What advice can be given to a person grievously distressed with fears, doubts, and unbelief?

[In perusing the subsequent letter, the query may be more fully understood.]

“ SIR,

“ AS you desired in your last, to know the particulars of my *unbelief*, of which I had complained in my preceding letter; you will find my compliance with your request in the following lines:—

“ My unbelief consists chiefly in these things, viz. I am in some doubt, now and then, concerning the being of God, his nature, attributes, and person:—concerning Jesus Christ, his excellency and mediatorial capacity, or qualifications:—concerning the Holy Ghost, regarding his immediate energy or operation on man:—concerning the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment, and the certainty that all persons that ever have been, are, or shall be, will exist in either of two

places or states. But my doubts, about these articles, are not so abiding as they be regarding the particulars hereafter mentioned: yet even these do grieve and distress my soul, more than a little, and I fear they be the cause of the hardness of my heart; especially when they attack me in prayer, meditation, &c. though when assaulted in my addresses to God, I know they have caused me to pray more earnestly at some seasons: then I would endeavour to conclude that they were darts from Satan, and not the disposition of my mind; yet still dreading myself to be an unbeliever.

“ But the most settled and general part of my unbelief may appear by the following hints, viz. I cannot view Jesus Christ in that loveliness, excellency, and pre-eminence, as I find him set forth in the word of truth; I cannot find sufficient ability in my soul to believe in him, wholly and unfeignedly: and how can I believe in him, without a right view of him? Sometimes I can set him forth to others, in the words and light of scripture, so that I believe many of the children of God have their very souls nourished and fed by what I say; and, upon certain times, I myself am much delighted in, and with the work: but when I retire into myself, and consider the barrenness of my soul, my strangeness to, and alienation from God, Jesus Christ, &c. I conclude that my good frame and my delight in preaching, proceed from the agreeable frame of the people, rather than from any good wrought in me; that God will endue me with a measure of light in his word, and grant me some delight in the ministration thereof, for the benefit of his people, yet not for any love or regard he has to my person, but that my soul is rejected of him: as a person that is favourable and kind to a nurse, while nursing his children, only for their sake; that thereby she might be a better and more qualified nurse; but when her work is done, he turns her off, as one that is not of his family, but only for a time and for the purpose just mentioned: then it will appear to all she never was of his family. Again, Though I set forth Christ to others, yet I question whether Christ be in me and I in him. A person cannot experience the true joy, except he believes: and because I cannot rejoice at the very thoughts of grace, death, the resurrection, and the like, I am afraid I do not truly and sincerely believe. Believers are exhorted to *rejoice always*; but I cannot rejoice when I ponder upon the most important concerns of my soul: therefore I fear I am not a believer. Alas, I am not able to look steadily upon Christ as *my Saviour*! At times, when I join with the saints in divine worship, I am

pretty confident of an interest in Christ; but when I retire, I conclude that that proceeds only from a kind of a heavenly gale upon them; or else upon myself, merely to capacitate me for more use and service among them. I conceive that my heart is not in the least renewed; but, in the sense of scripture, is still a stone.—I do not question God's everlasting love to his people, as much as I do his love to *me*. What will it avail me to know that God is unchangeable, and that his unchangeableness is a strong hold to his people, under all their instabilities and vicissitudes, when at the same time I cannot conclude that he hath loved *me*? Are there not some whom he never loved? I fear I am one of those. If he has not loved me, all the things in heaven and on earth, nay, his infinite power cannot prevail with him to love me, seeing he is unchangeable in his nature.—I do not question the ability and capacity of Jesus Christ, *to save to the uttermost*, even the vilest and chief of sinners, so much as I question whether he will save *me*; not because he *cannot*, regarding his capacity, but because he *will not*; not because my sins, though so great and numerous, are more than he can take away; but I fear lest he should leave me to die in them. One sin is enough to condemn, except there be an interest in Christ.—I do not so much call in question perseverance in grace, as I do the beginning of grace in me. If I were sure that the good work of grace was begun in my soul, I think all my other doubts would flee away and vanish. But while I doubt of the very beginning of the work, I cannot be confident in any thing that may profit me. If I did now endeavour to resolve, believe, and conclude myself to be a gracious person, and that it will be well with me at last, notwithstanding all my fears, and so strive to be comfortable, not giving way to doubts any more, such confidence would but vanish after all, to my endless horror.—I endeavour to perform every secret duty in religion constantly; but fear all my aim is to quiet an uneasy conscience. I diligently observe every public duty, as a professor of the christian religion, and as a minister of the gospel; yet often fear the whole terminates in self and vainglory, so that I have my reward! I am acquainted with many, far and near, who, I believe, are godly persons; and I am of opinion that the greatest part of them, if not all, judge me to be truly a gracious man; nay, I am confident they look upon me as a person eminent in grace: but all that does not amount to a proof of the power of godliness in me, neither does it evidence the least degree of supernatural grace in my heart. I think that pious people, who hear me preaching

and praying, conclude that I am very comfortable in my soul, and that I enjoy much communion with God in the discharge of duties ; but their conjecture is no evidence that I enjoy the least grain of solid comfort : though their favourable judgment should yield me some groundless joy for the present, yet if I am not born again, it can yield me no sweet consolation at death and judgment. I am endued with some measure of light in all the doctrines of grace which I believe are consistent, according to the scripture ; and I am enabled to express, and set them forth according to the consistency of my ideas, against the oppositions made to them, both in private conference, and in a more public manner : but that profiteth me nothing myself, while I imagine that I am an utter stranger to any experience of saving-grace in my own soul. Satan knew very well that all the doctrines of grace are remarkably harmonious, yet he is not, in the least, more happy for that.—I am in the general persuaded, that all those who believe in Christ shall be saved : but as I cannot believe, how can I be saved ? the word says, that *perfect love casteth out fear* : I fear greatly ; I cannot be confident, but rather disbelieve ; therefore how can the love of God dwell in me ? and if I love not God, what is my state better than that of the most profligate ? Though I understand something of the doctrine of grace, I understand likewise, by the same doctrine and by experience, that nothing can persuade me to believe in Christ, but the Spirit of God ; and if I should believe in Christ, I perceive that it is impossible for any to convince me that my faith is of the right kind, except it be by the same Spirit. Therefore, Oh ! that God would be pleased to make use of some means, some word, some instrument or instruments, to resolve my doubts and dissipate my fears, for his own glory, and my present and eternal comfort and advantage ! Oh, where shall such a *messenger* be found ! An interpreter that would be to me one among a thousand ! I am,

“ Your’s, &c.”

My advice is this : that such a person should instantly attempt his duty, to believe on Christ afresh, just as he did at first. When he cannot come to Christ as a believer, let him come, as being in himself, an every-way helpless and miserable sinner ; and let him do this instantly and repeatedly, as soon, and as often, as he is attacked with fear from his felt and future dreaded misery. Nothing like a fresh act of faith, to baffle Satan’s temptation, and the suggestions of his own

unbelieving heart, that he is yet in a state of *unbelief*. If the grand enemy of souls can but get believers to reason the point with him, whether they have believed, or not, from past experiences in the time of veiled evidences, or from present experience, at a time of suspended influence: he knows he will lead them at once into an endless maze of sore perplexity, to God's dishonour, and to the wounding of their souls exceedingly. Let such a person then attend the Saviour's voice, — *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else*. Here such a person may see that the words divide themselves naturally into two branches: the first respects duty, *looking*; the second respects privilege, *salvation*. And the command is given to sinners, at the greatest apprehended distance from God, by sin, at the very *ends of the earth*. Let such a person then, as a sin-wounded soul, an apprehended law-condemned sinner, a Satan-accused, and a conscience-condemned sinner too, instantly look up to that great Saviour who is exalted on high, to save to the uttermost every poor soul that looks unto him for the whole of his salvation. For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so once was the Son of man lifted up on the cross; and now is the Son of man, as the great ordinance of God, for a sinner's salvation, lifted up to his Father's throne, and in the glorious gospel, to be looked unto by a perishing sinner for his eternal life, as the stung Israelite was to look for healing, by God's appointment, to the brazen serpent: and having looked, let such a person instantly attempt his further duty, to believe that he shall be *saved* in looking. Let him credit the word of truth, the royal grant of the prince of grace, from his high throne of his *everlasting salvation*, in his looking unto him; for lo, he says unto all and unto every one of them, *Be ye saved*. The word is gone out of his mouth in faithfulness, in immutable, omnipotent grace; and he will not, cannot reverse it: he is God, and cannot *lie*, nor *repent*. Once hath he spoken, and it stands fast for ever. His unchanging word, of all-producing grace and glory, stands engaged for that soul's salvation eternally. And thus, he himself, who is *the faithful and true witness*, tells us, that the inseparable consequent of his being looked unto, as lifted up, is *salvation*; *that-whosoever believeth in him* (i. e. looks unto him to answer the type,) *should not perish, but have everlasting life*. Now let such a person consider, whether this solemn declaration of the great Saviour, is not worthy to be *credited by him*, instantly, and constantly for God's glory, and his own joy? Whoever, or

whatever, from within, or without him, says to the contrary, can he doubt it, if it is but for one moment, without grievous sin, without making the God of truth a *liar*? He must, even in this, either *set to his seal, that God is true*, or give his truth the lie. Again, let such a person observe, that his looking unto Christ for salvation, in obedience to the divine command, is faith's *first* and *direct* act, unto which the promise of life, in the sacred word, is annexed. And his persuasion of salvation is an *after* and *reflex* act of faith, that is, and ought to be, founded upon the promise given to him, as a believer in Jesus: the former respects his eternal security; the latter, God's glory and his more abundant joy. If he has now put forth the direct act, he is, and ever shall be, in God's account, and according to his written word, a *true believer*: and though he may not at present make conscience of the reflex act, or may be obstructed in the exercise of it, by Satan and unbelief, this makes no alteration in his *state* as a believer, but only robs God of that glory which he ought to give to his Saviour, and himself of that joy which is his soul's desire, in a full persuasion of God's everlasting favour. Having been so prolix in my answer to the query, I need say the less to the letter, but

Dear Sir, take a few hints. You tell us, "that you still dread yourself to be an unbeliever." As to *this*, if I understand you right, you take believing in Christ, through the main of your letter, to be a believing your *interest* in the Saviour unto joy in his infinite favour. This is answered above, as being *that* which doth not constitute your *state* as a believer: it is the *direct* act of faith, in looking, coming, fleeing, &c. unto the Saviour, that puts a specific difference between *you*, and all the *unbelievers* in the world. Indeed, Sir, in this closing part of your sentence, you preface it with your being tempted to doubt of these several articles of faith. You do well, when thus assaulted, to endeavour to conclude that they are darts from Satan; but as to their "not being the disposition of your mind," you must distinguish between your *new* and your *old* mind. Darts from Satan, they are most certainly, to wound your new mind, and to excite in your old its native infidelity. For in you, though a believer, there dwells and works unbelief; and Satan's temptations, to disbelieve the doctrines of faith, as well as our acts of faith, may more or less draw out the forces of our unbelief with respect to both. And what Satan suggests, is the disposition of your own mind, so far as it is unbelieving; but this remaining unbelief, ought not in any wise to make you doubt of your having the grace of faith in

your heart: for if you had not faith in those doctrines, your temptations to doubt them would be to you no affliction. It is your new mind, or your soul, so far as renewed by grace, and blest with the grace of faith, that is grieved and distressed with temptations to, and the workings of, unbelief. Again, Sir, you say, "I cannot view Jesus Christ in that loveliness, excellency, and pre-eminence, as I find him set forth in the word of truth. I cannot find sufficient ability in my soul to believe in him wholly, entirely, and unfeignedly; and how can I believe in him without a right view of him?" Let me ask you, have there been *no moments* in which you have viewed Christ, in that loveliness, excellency, and pre-eminence, in which he is set forth in the word of truth? If you have ever seen his glory, when presented to your eye of faith by the Holy Ghost in the word of truth, how did you esteem of him then? Did he not then appear, in your view, to be transcendently excellent! A Saviour none like unto him! If he *did*, this was *faith*, in your *understanding*, discerning, or *seeing of the Son*; and how did this work upon your *will*? Did not your will bow to, and choose the Saviour beheld as, and to be, *your Saviour*? If it *did*, this was *faith* in your *will*; and hence did not your affections go out after him? Was not he *altogether lovely*, or *all desires*, unto you? If so, this was *faith* in your *affections*, or that faith which worketh by *love*, to its all-surpassing, and altogether lovely object! And have there been *no moments* in which the blood of Christ, in its cleansing, and pardon, and peace-procuring efficacy, has appeared sufficient to your conscience? In which his righteousness, as your desired justifying dress, has appeared all-glorious? In which his fulness of sanctifying grace, unto an increasing, and perfect meetness for eternal glory, appeared to *you* most precious and soul-satisfactory? If there *has*, this was *faith* in your *conscience*; and so you have been blest with a spiritual, a supernatural *ability*, to believe in Christ wholly, in a whole Christ, with all the powers of your soul, so far as they are renewed. And whether you refer this faith to its direct, or reflex act, it is true with respect to both; so far as they are put forth, you *believe wholly* in a whole Christ, with all the powers of your soul, so far as they are sanctified initially: and yet, with regard to the unrenewed, unsanctified part which still remains in your every faculty, you may be said as truly *not* to believe in Christ *wholly*, i. e. with all the powers of your soul as *entire* faculties; as darkness in your understanding, rebellion in your will, earthliness in your affection, and legality in your conscience still

remain ; but your regenerate part, being your *leading* principle of action, your acts of faith therein, are in every power of your soul therefrom, on and in Christ : from hence you are denominated a *believer in him* ; and however unbelief in your unregenerate part, may be permitted to work, this doth not in the least injure *that* your estate. You add, Sir : “ Sometimes I can set him forth to others, in the words and light of scripture ; and upon certain times, I myself am much delighted with the work : but when I retire into myself, and consider the barrenness of my soul, my strangeness to, and alienation from God, Jesus Christ, &c. I conclude that my good frame and delight in preaching, proceed from the agreeable frame of the people, rather than from any good wrought in me.” To this I reply : that your retiring into yourself, to consider your own *barrenness*, &c. is from the weakness of your faith in its *reflex* act, which ought to be strong in, and towards the promise, given you in Christ upon your first *direct* act. *Abraham considered not his own body being dead, nor yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb ; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, believing that what he had promised, he was able also to perform.* And it is an excellency in Abraham’s children, Abraham-like, to be *strong in faith*, to consider the promise, and God’s power and faithfulness, and not their own barrenness. Your conclusion, Sir, “ That your delight in preaching Christ proceeded rather from the agreeable frame of the people in hearing,” I think is ill-founded. As you afterwards say, “ At times, when I join with the saints in divine worship, I am pretty confident of an interest in Christ.” Now, Sir, as I take it, this your confidence of interest in Christ, while preaching him to others, is the ground of your supreme delight in the work ; though from the agreeable frame of the people in hearing, you may have a lower additional pleasure in your being an instrument to exalt your Beloved before others, and thereby to win them unto faith in Jesus, and to build up those who have believed through grace on their most holy faith ; and your faith of interest in Christ, which gives you a supreme delight in the work, is a pregnant proof, that God has wrought in your faith’s good and saving work. Once more you say, “ God will endue me with a measure of light in his word, and give me some delight in the ministration thereof, for the benefit of his people, yet not for any love or regard he has to my person ; as a person is favourable to a nurse, while nursing his children, but when her work is done he turns her off, as one that is not of his family.”

This, Sir, is a temptation and an affliction that is common to you, with others of your ministering brethren. The grand enemy, though he cannot destroy the Lord's servants eternally, by this he strives to destroy their joy in his service temporally: he well knows that what the Lord's servants love supremely, which is himself, and his special favour eternally, they cannot bear a thought that they must part with these without pain of extremity. No, dear Sir, God has adopted you as a believer into his family; and, from his love to your person, he calls you to be a servant to some of your dear brethren: and having put you among the children of his infinite favour, you shall abide in his family for ever, and possess, with the rest, his great Self, as your vast and eternal inheritance! If you believe the Saviour's ability and doubt his will, to save you eternally, come and *try*,—come in all your discerned pollution and misery, and fall down before him, and say,—*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*: and Jesus, moved with compassion, will say, *I will; be thou clean*.

QUEST. XII.

Is the death and sufferings of Christ, or his passive obedience, all that is required for the salvation and justification of a sinner? Hath his active righteousness no part in the work, or must it be imputed? Is the imputation of Christ's active righteousness, an essential point of doctrine, or may a man be safe without it?

A MOST momentous and necessary query! as it tends to put the sinner upon the most accurate inquiry after things of the greatest importance, viz. the matter and cause of his justification before God, and acceptance with him,—things essential to our present and future happiness, and without which none can be saved; the knowledge of which is both prior and previous to a person's knowing either his duty, or privilege, how to

worship God, or pray acceptably, or what to believe and rely on the Lord Jesus Christ for.

To suppose the sufferings and death of Christ all that is required for the salvation of a sinner, is to answer Paul in the affirmative, who asked the Corinthians, *Is Christ divided?* 1 Cor. i. 13. Yea, this would not only divide, but reject and cast away part of Christ, as useless and of no value; a thought to be abhorred by every pious soul. The believer hath a whole Christ for his salvation, viz. the life and death, body and soul of Christ, all are his, and he is Christ's, 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. As the law of God requires perfection and perpetual obedience of the sinless, so it pronounceth condemnation and death on the sinful; which sentence justice will certainly inflict, unless reconciliation be made, and plenary satisfaction given; which satisfaction cannot be but by the death of the High-priest: for without shedding of blood is no remission; and it is not possible the blood of beasts should take away sins, therefore Christ hath done it with his own blood, Gen. xxi. 27. Gal. iii. 10. Numb. xxxv. 32. Heb. ix. 22. and x. 4. Col. i. 22. Rom. v. 11. Now, as the passive obedience of Christ is absolutely necessary for the washing and saving the soul from guilt, and all the dreadful effects of sin, Rev. i. 5. so his active righteousness is as necessary to constitute the sinner righteous before God, Zec. 3. 4: for as one delivers from hell, the other makes ready for, and recommends to, heaven, Matt. xxii. 11, 13, Rev. xix. 7, 8. Here Matthew presents to our view a man not having a wedding-garment, with his last and miserable end, *bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness.* John shows us the bride, the Lamb's wife made ready, and tells us what her wedding-garment is, *fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.* Let it be observed, this righteousness of saints is either wrought out by the saints themselves, or by some other person for them: that it is not wrought out by them is certain, because all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, Isa. lxiv. 6. But Christ's righteousness is clean and white, wrought out for the saints, given to them, and put upon them; as Paul affirms, Rom. v. 17. *They which receive abundance of grace, and the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ.* Even as David described the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Rom. iv. 6.

Whatever God doth, is essential and right; and as he is declared to impute righteousness to the blessed, it must be essential and right, nor can a man be safe without it: this

Paul knew right well, and therefore suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung, that he might win Christ, and be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, Phil. iii. 8, 9. viz. Christ's righteousness imputed, which is wrought out by God the Son, given by God the Father, revealed by God the Spirit, and received by faith as the soul's justifying dress.

Perhaps some may object, and ask, Is it natural, reasonable and just, to suppose one man is righteous, because another is so? Or that one man is made righteous by the obedience of another?

Answer, between man in common it is not so, nor is it reasonable so to think; but between Christ and his church, it is most natural, reasonable, and just it should be so, because of that federal union subsisting between them; he the head, and they the body, so as they are no more twain, but one, i. e. one body and one Christ, one Spirit and one life, Col. i. 18. 1 Cor. xii. 16, 17. Col. iii. 3, 4. Heb. ii. 11. Whatever is done and suffered by any person, whether it be by his head, or any other member of his body, we naturally, reasonably, and very justly, ascribe the same to that person, and the whole man or body bears the shame, or receives the reward, according to the merit or demerit of the thing done, good or bad, 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26, 27. Hence it is, that our sins against God fell on Christ, Rom. xv. 3. and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us. For, as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous.

Whatever is done by the head, is justly imputed to the body; Christ the head, having fulfilled the whole righteousness of the law, therefore it is justly imputed to his body, the church, Rom. viii. 5. that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in, or by us.

QUEST. XIII.

Is it possible for a person, who is enabled to bewail his own vileness, to be assured of an interest in Christ, with eternal joy; and yet not have an astonishing view of the glory, fulness, and suitableness of the Mediator, engaging and constraining him to love his Saviour, and delight in his ways? And is it possible to have such an affecting view of Christ before regeneration?

IN all our researches of this nature, we should sincerely aim at the glory of God, our own growth in grace, and the edification of others. When this is the case, we may and ought to pray earnestly that we may be directed in the right way; neither should we despair of a blessing. With regard to the query, I believe that God is often pleased to condescend so far as to indulge his people with a comfortable view of their interest in Christ, and consequently of their eternal glory and joy. I mean a view so clear and evident, that they may say, *My Lord and my God; I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; who shall separate, &c.* and at the same time, the believer may have a very distressing view of his own vileness. I do not think there is a child of God upon earth without the rebellious, warring law in his members. How necessary, and yet how humbling and self-abasing it is, to see the depravity of our nature! upon some seasons the blackness and comeliness may appear at the same time. I am of opinion, that the comeliness seldom or never appears, but the blackness is also in view. A very instructive contrast to a follower of Jesus Christ. I suppose Job had a clear evidence of the favour of God, as well as the majesty of Jehovah, when he cried out, *I abhor myself!* When the Apostle breaks forth in that mournful manner, *O wretched man, &c.* he could thank God for the victory through Jesus Christ. When he talks of the *incorruptible* glory above, he points at the *corruptible* here: and when he mentions the *glorious* body of Christ in heaven, and the saints' likeness to him there, he does not forget the *vile* body here. These observations appear to me very evident, viz,

The clearer any one doth see his relation to, and interest in Christ, the more he will see and bewail his own depravity.

A person may sometimes have a very oppressing sense of the prevalency of sin, and at the same time his interest in Christ much clouded and called in question; yet at those very seasons he may be under the saving and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

It is possible, and perhaps too common, for true believers to be in so stupid a frame, that they are little affected with a sense of sin, or of the beauty of Christ and true holiness. These are sad seasons, and much to be dreaded; for where they be of long continuance, the state of that poor barren soul is much to be lamented.

It is my certain and unshaken belief, that a person can never be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so as to be assured of his interest in Christ, but he will, under the heart-purifying operation of the same Spirit, bewail bitterly the remainder of indwelling sin. This heart-grief and sorrow is quite consistent with spiritual peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. I believe likewise, that where this sorrow and joy really exist, the person must of necessity have an astonishing view of the glory, fulness, and suitableness of the Mediator, his willingness, power, and capacity to purify entirely, and glorify eternally, a worm so vile in itself. This view of things will certainly engage the heart to love Jesus Christ in the most sincere and affectionate manner, and out of love excite to yield him cordial, grateful, and cheerful obedience, in principle and practice. I am confident, that it is impossible to experience these things, in their transforming and affecting manner above noted, before regeneration. Then these consequences will follow:

There may be assurance, or strong faith, where much corruption still remains unmortified; the Canaanites will dwell in the land; yet this faith purifies the heart, breathes after more holiness, and is in arms against the Canaanites.

That true faith, weak or strong, leads not to a loose, unguarded, and licentious life.

That the faith which disposes to a dissolute conduct is not genuine, but a most pernicious delusion.

That those who say assurance leads to licentiousness, do testify how destitute they are of the real experience of the true grace of God.

That when a person doth love Jesus Christ, and depend upon him for acceptance with God; when he doth hate sin, love and follow holiness, he may conclude that he is born again.

That when a person doth not experience these things, he may conclude himself to be in a natural state, and in the *broad way*.

QUEST. XIV.

As I apprehend that the practice of family-prayer is unfashionable in our days, is it because this age is so much wiser than the last ; or, is it because we are less acquainted with the life, power, and comfort of that religion, which is pure and undefiled before God ?

A QUERY upon social religion in the family, is already well answered, page 329 ; where it is very justly observed, that, “ when vital religion and the power of godliness are upon the decline, this social religion in the family is almost the first thing neglected.”—That reading a portion of scripture to the household, and praying with them, is not only expedient and profitable, but an incumbent duty, is evidently proved, I think, in that answer.—That it is very much neglected, and by some professors even derided, is a mournful truth, so glaring and open, that it wants no proof. That it was much more in practice a century past, may be easily demonstrated. Now the query is, Whether the present race of professors have attained to a superior degree of wisdom above their fathers, or doth this negligence proceed from some other cause ? I will not pretend to justify every thing in our holy, valiant, and heavenly-minded ancestors ; but I dare say, they did imitate that great and renowned man, Abraham, who, for his eminency, was styled, *the friend of God*, and *father of the faithful*, better than their successors do. He took care to erect an altar for God in his house, and set his children and servants an honourable precedent : how well they were trained up in religion, may be seen in the piety and faithfulness of his chief servant. God himself, the searcher of his heart, gives him this excellent and exemplary character, *I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the*

way of the Lord. A glorious testimony, where the family was so numerous, and many of them slaves bought with his money: it would be well if our countrymen in America would lay this example more to heart, and endeavour to copy after it. But alas! we have here in this land of light and peace, many professing families, that call not upon God: will not *Cornelius*, the gentile officer in the Roman army, rise up in judgment against them? He was diligent in prayer, and feared God, with all his house,—a clear evidence what pains he took with his family, and that his religion was not confined to his closet. Perhaps the prayerless masters of our families would soon be offended, were they told, that their conduct doth evidence they are but little acquainted with the life, power, and comfort of true religion; and that they neither fear God, nor regard the souls of their families. If what is already observed in the answer above mentioned, is not sufficient to convince them of their duty, I pray that God may, in his mercy, show them the right path, and deliver them from fatal deceptions. I think it needless to add any more that way upon the subject. However, I would beg leave to propose a few queries to three sorts of people:

I. To those who treat the point with disdain, and boldly plead it is not their duty to read the scripture, and pray morning and evening with their family.

Do you not greatly, if not entirely, neglect closet-prayer, self-examination, and heavenly-contemplation? Then it is no wonder you neglect others.

Do you bring up your children and servants in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Let conscience answer in the presence of God.

If you do; pray what method do you take with them? Consider well.

Do you take care to bring them acquainted with the word of God, with their misery by nature, and the absolute necessity of an interest in Christ?

Do they know very well that you pray often, and highly value the scripture; or have they room to conclude you seldom, if ever, pray?

Do you oppose the practice, because you believe in your conscience that it is a sin before God to read the word and pray in your family? Or do you oppose it, because you are too indolent to engage in it, and too busy about other concerns that better suit your taste?

Do you think it to be the work of Satan to promote family

worship, but the work of the Holy Spirit to demolish it; or is it the contrary?

Can you, in the presence of God, say to those under your care, *I am clear from your blood?* If not, what will be the issue?

II. To those who believe it their duty, but often, if not always, neglect it.

Be you so negligent about the affairs of this world as you be about the very important concerns of the next? Think of it seriously.

Do you think reading a chapter and prayer would much hinder and hurt your secular business? Did you ever find it so? Is time so precious, that you cannot afford half an hour, morning and evening, for religious exercises?

Do not strangers, that come accidentally into your house, wonder they find no more religion under your roof? Is this adorning the gospel?

Are you more skilful to excuse your negligence, than to reform it? How will this turn out at last?

III. To those who are willing to set up, and carry on this family religion, but are too bashful, and afraid they have not sufficient qualifications for it.

Do you earnestly pray in your closet, that you may be enabled to discharge the duties incumbent upon you as the governor and leader of a family?

Did you attempt your duty? Do it again, and wait for a blessing: think more about it, read more, and converse more about religion with your family. Consult also with solid, pious, and judicious friends, that are capable of advising you. If it is a duty, do it as well as you can; you will improve.

QUEST. XV.

How may a person know that he is justified, pardoned, and accepted with God; and how many ways God takes, according to scripture, to give evidence and comfort of such justification, &c?

I SUPPOSE the author of the query, by justification, pardon, and acceptance with God, would be thought to mean a *manifestation* of it to the conscience. As I apprehend, that all the elect of God were from eternity virtually justified, so I look upon a discovery of interest in it, to be a weighty and awful concern; and if this be the meaning of the gentleman that proposed the query, it is as much as if he had said, "What foundation stands my soul upon, respecting another world? On what basis are my hopes built for heaven; and where will my soul be lodged, when it leaves the earthly house, the prison of the body, and takes its flight into a world of spirits?" These thoughts have occasioned the attention of my mind, and often employ my thoughts to the utmost extent; and such will be the case with those whose search is truly ingenuous and spiritual, whose powers and faculties of soul are lively, and all directed by the unerring guidance and management of the Lord the Spirit; for as led by this teacher, every sensible sinner has his recourse to the Spirit for such manifestation, &c.

For a person to know that he is justified, pardoned, and accepted with God, is a thing of great importance, though a privilege that perhaps is peculiar only to some of God's people, or but a few of them comparatively enjoy the comfortable sensation of. Among others, it is one of the chiefest of the secrets of the Lord, revealed only to them that fear him, Ps. xxv. 14. a secret that can never be purchased by any creature whatsoever; a secret that no natural man, (as such,) can ever be acquainted with; a secret that is not only totally hid from the men of this world, but sometimes for a season, from the favourites of the Lord, his own dear children that he esteems as his jewels, and who will be evidently so in the day when he makes them up, Mal. iii. 17; a secret that will ever employ the saints in their Father's house, while the glorious displays of

the greatness of the grace, will demand the attention, and excite the wonder of the angelic tribes.

That there are but few of the Lord's family acquainted satisfactorily with it, appears from their many great and bitter complaints, the frequent distresses they are in, the sinkings of soul they labour under; who, with David, in another case, are sometimes heard to say, with uncommon compunction, *O my God, my soul is cast down within me!* Ps. xlii. 6. Which having been my case, through divine goodness being delivered from the burden, I can therefore speak of it by experience; having found, it is one thing to be justified, pardoned, and accepted, (which are the words of the query,) and another thing to know the mercy belongs to me: the former ascertains the safety of the people of God, that they can never perish, nor miscarry of everlasting happiness; and the latter is the foundation of their present comfort, under all their trials in the wilderness, as that which enables them by the Spirit of the Lord, always to triumph in Christ: and as to the knowledge of this justification, pardon, and acceptance with God, it is through believing in Jesus Christ for salvation, which a soul could not do, did not the mercy belong to him, and were it not *given on the behalf of Christ*, Phil. i. 29. *and he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved*, Mark xvi. 16. *and he that believeth hath the witness in himself*, 1 John v. 10. *and as the Apostle fully expresseth it in Acts xiii. 39. by him, [Christ] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.* From which it is evident, and an inquiring soul may rest satisfied in the truth of this, that whoever believes in Christ, whether he be a Jew or Gentile, as his faith fastens upon and lays hold of him, he is justified, his sins are pardoned, he is accepted with God.

The first part of the life of young Christians is mostly made up of sight: they have sensible enjoyments from the Lord: and here their souls are filled with raptures; they can bless and praise the Lord, and exult in him; can tell others what he has done for their souls: here their mountain stands strong, and they can do much for Christ, under such divine influence; and with Peter, they think and say, *Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death*, Luke xxii. 33. They find no duty hard or difficult; can pray with much fervour and enlargement of soul; their mouths are filled with arguments at the throne of grace; the spirit of the Lord is now a spirit of freedom and liberty: they are not shut up as in after-seasons, but entertained with the pleasing beauties of a risen and exalted

Redeemer, at which times they can trust the Lord, and are ready to think that this is all faith, and that they are strong in this grace, when at the same time this is rather sensation arising from the evident manifestation of the divine presence: now, when these are withdrawn from them, there is little or no faith in exercise to be found; their joy, hope, and consolation, (to them) seem for a while to be lost; and, in fact, some of them, when this is the case, are ready to think, that their Christ, pardon of sins, and heaven, are all gone: but faith believes, trusteth in the Lord, lives upon Christ, and the fulness of grace that there is in him; walks with him in darkness, lives upon what it shall one day enjoy, and depends upon him when he hides his face, believing the word and promises of God, his faithfulness to perform them, the certainty of the covenant of grace, and the respects in which it is well ordered: here *the statutes of the Lord* (by the view of faith,) *become the songs of the saints in the house of their pilgrimage*, Ps. cxix. 54. I would not be understood to think light of the presence of Christ, nor write any thing diminutively of it, having enjoyed the happiness of it in my own soul, and prizing it above all the world, and all things in it, nay, ten thousand of worlds: I know nothing that can be compared with it, having found it my strength, hope and joy, meat and drink, the life of my soul, and substance of vital godliness; but I speak of these things in this manner, to show the mistaken notions of young Christians at such seasons, and how apt we are to take that for a life of faith which is rather the sweet emanations of divine love, wrought in the soul by the Spirit of Christ in a special and sensible enjoyment of his presence, which is sight, more properly than faith, though the latter is a concomitant that will always attend it in our present state: neither can the former be where the latter is wanted, except it be in imagination only; for faith must be first seated in the soul, (as to the habit of it at least,) before it can be known that there is sensible communion with the Lord; for it is after believing, that the soul has holy joy, comfort, peace, and consolation, and the visits of Christ in a saving way: to suppose the contrary, will appear as ridiculous as it is blasphemous, unscriptural, and diametrically opposite to the experience of all the redeemed of the Lord, who at times enjoy both his sensible presence as well as a persuasion of faith in him, each of which are prelibations, or foretastes of the best things, and by which it may be known, or a soul may fairly conclude that he is justified, his sins are pardoned, he is accepted with God, &c. It is true,

and I grant that there may be that faith in the soul, that is of a right kind, called *like precious faith*, 2 Pet. i. 1. and *the faith of the operation of God*, Col. ii. 12. and *faith which worketh by love*, Gal. v. 6. and *faith that purifies the heart*, Acts xv. 9. &c. and at the same time it may be difficult for the subject of it to determine whether he has it or not, the thing may appear dubious and doubtful to the soul, for want of a close application to the word, the nature of God's dealings with those he brings to glory, and the various methods he makes use of in effecting the same. Where corruptions work strongly, and are frequently bubbling up, and there is but a small measure of faith, it is not to be wondered at: most of God's people, at their first awakenings, find it to be so; though the genuine effects of it, as a living faith, are evident and satisfactory to other saints, who have tasted and savingly handled them themselves, and find them agreeably recorded in the sacred writings, and can make out their title to heaven from them, as such that believe, are justified, their sins pardoned, and they accepted with God.

But to make the thing more evident, (as to my own experience of it, respecting the author of the query, if the Lord is pleased to bless it to him, or any other of God's people,) as by faith in Christ, I can be assured that I am justified, my sins are pardoned, and I am accepted with God, I apprehend that my faith is of a right kind, because I have been enabled to venture my soul upon Christ, and I find none ever did this and perished, were lost and cast away. The case of the soul that is brought to do this, is like that of the four lepers, mentioned 2 Kings vii. 3, 4. *And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate; and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we shall die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.* So the soul that is spiritually enlightened from above, views himself as a leper by sin, a nauseous and filthy creature in his own eyes, in a deplorable state and condition, undone as to any help in himself, and either more or less for the present is ready to conclude, he must be shut out of the camp of God for ever; till he has faith given him, whereby, upon the declaration of the gospel in its power, he looks to Christ, and runs where the righteous run and find safety, Prov. xviii. 10. and says, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*; Mat. viii. 2. and to some the Lord

is pleased, more clearly and particularly, to say as he did to his disciples, John xv. 3. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you*; and what was this, but the word of faith, the word of sanctification, the word of hope, the word of peace, and the word of pardon, brought home to the soul by the Spirit of the Lord, which removes the burden of sin, (though the soul may experience sad declensions and backslidings, and may be heard with David, under a sense of it, to cry to the Lord to *restore to him the joy of his salvation, and to uphold him with his free spirit*, Ps. li. 12.) and enables the soul to believe that God abides faithful, and cannot deny himself, and thus to depend upon it, that he is justified, his sins pardoned, and he accepted with God, &c. A conformity to Christ, in a measure, with gospel obedience, will ever be found where the new creature is, and there is a solid foundation for heaven, the Apostle Paul lays it down for granted as an undeniable maxim, *that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness*, Rom. vi. 16. from which I would conclude, that yielding obedience to a person, proves the person so yielding this obedience to be his servant; and this obedience will ever follow a soul's venturing upon Christ: but to make it appear more plainly, I would give the reasons why I conclude I have ventured my soul upon Christ; and,

I. I conclude I have ventured my soul upon Christ, or into his hands, as I have seen my need of him: a conviction of the need of Christ is absolutely necessary and prior to a sinner's venturing upon him; and, without it, it is impossible to be done: the prodigal, convicted of this and his own imbecility, cries out, *I perish with hunger; and I will arise, and go to my father*, Luke xv. 17, 18. *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*, Mat. ix. 12. and the Spirit of Christ discovers this to the soul, not the law, (which may show a man his misery, and there leave him, without pointing out to him any remedy; but cannot show him a Christ, nor lay before him the need he has of an interest in him,) this being the proper work of Christ, revealed to the soul by his Spirit, which *searches all things, yea, the deep things of God*, 1 Cor. ii. 10. *which convinces of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*, John xvi. 8. Neither does a saving or spiritual conviction, wherever it is, leave the soul under a view of his miserable state without hope, wretched and undone, as a legal or natural conviction does. Great sorrow for sin is not always

a proof that the heart is right with God ; it be may where there is no grace of a saving nature, no love to God nor delight in him, nor spiritual life in the soul : such was the sorrow of Cain, Judas, and others. Fear of punishment may fill the mind with horror and terror, make a man formally serve God ; but the reason is, fear of the devil, and so his sorrow leaves him upon the verge of hell, in the very suburbs of damnation : his conscience not being cleansed, nor purged by faith, in the blood of Christ, must necessarily be evil ; and so it may haunt him from place to place, testifying that he is not only a sinner, but a great one too, and so remaining a stranger to the sanctifying work of the Spirit of the Lord upon his soul, and having no believing views of Christ, will, sooner or later, make him conclude, notwithstanding his great degrees of sorrow, that his case is desperate, and will admit of no relief.

II. I conclude that I have ventured my soul upon Christ, because I have been enabled to confide in him, even in seasons of darkness, both in providence and as to the frame of my mind, and have trusted him with it and all its concerns, agreeably to what the Psalmist declares, *and they that know thy name, will put their trust in thee*, Ps. ix. 10. here I have found myself immoveable as mount Zion, Ps. cxxv. 1. Nothing could move me from my hold and confidence : here I could not only challenge, but face death and hell, and all the powers of darkness ; here I saw my soul stedfast, and well anchored amidst the storms and billows of a fluctuating state and tempestuous world ; here I could meet all opposition, and see every mountain of apparent and supposed difficulties to become a plain, Zeeh. iv. 6, 7. come trials, temptations, evil tidings, or death, my heart was fixed, I was not afraid of them, *trusting in the Lord*, Ps. cxii. 7.

III. I conclude that I have ventured my soul upon Christ, having been enabled to take him as the gift of grace, the gift of God, for my whole and complete salvation. Here I saw the emptiness and insufficiency of all things but Christ ; and every thing in this world was so many nothings and dross, when compared with him : I heartily approved of him, and him only, as God's way of saving sinners ; through the fulness of his offering and satisfaction to divine justice. These things I have mentioned in the room of many others, from which I conclude I have ventured my soul upon Christ, and that I am justified, my sins pardoned, and my person accepted with God : but here are six things, among others, that I was greatly taken with in Christ.

1. With his supreme ability as a Saviour; that *he was able to save to the uttermost, all that come to God by him*, Heb. vii.

25. that no sin or iniquity whatever, could be any bar in his way; he speaks in righteousness, *mighty to save*, Isa. lxiii. 1. and is called the *mighty God*, Isa. ix. 6. capable, and every way qualified and fitted for so great an undertaking: mighty, without any aid from men or angels;—mighty to fulfil, make good, and perform, all that he has promised;—mighty beyond all our mighty and potent enemies, whether men, devils, or corruptions: and this is beautifully implied in every sensible sinner's being brought to him in the language of the disciples, *Lord, save us; we perish*, Mat. viii. 25.

2. I was greatly taken with the call of Christ, not in an outward, but inward and spiritual way, Rom. ii. 28, 29. (I sat long under the means of grace, and was so externally called, but knew nothing of the power of grace till the Lord was pleased to work it,) I found my heart waxing warm to the Lord: this was the day of his power, when he made me willing to relinquish all my former hopes and righteousness—I was enabled to hunger and thirst after the bread and water of life, and nothing but Christ, and him alone, could satisfy my soul.—I found him to be my rest, and seldom went to the throne of grace but I enjoyed his presence, my heart was drawn forth, and *my soul like the chariots of Aminadab*, Cant. vi. 12. and the more my joys and comforts were, the more my soul was humbled in me.—I was enabled to praise the Lord, to bless the Lord, and lift up my hands in his name, Ps. lxiii. 3, 4. This was a time of love manifested and discovered; and such was the indulgence of the Lord, that at some seasons, it was but to ask and have: I drank deeply of that love that passeth knowledge, and must say was sometimes almost filled to the brim; and from hence began to conclude, I should never know darkness, nor carnality any more, as the Lord manifested his everlasting love, by *drawing me with loving-kindness*, Jer. xxxi. 3. as the effect of his early regard for me. There was no previous preparations nor qualifications in my soul prior to this, that I could ever find; nor should I ever have desired Christ, or loved him, had he not first set his *desire upon me, and loved me*, Cant. vii. 10. 1 John iv. 19. and his making it known by calling me, is an undeniable evidence of my relation to him, as the Apostle expresseth it: *Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified*, Rom. viii. 30. so that it is plain, from this portion of scripture,

that a person that is thus called by special grace, may make it out that he is justified, his sins are pardoned, and that he is accepted with God.

3. I was greatly taken with Christ, in his taking possession of my heart: in consequence of this, and not before, was I enabled to give it to him, and observe his ways, Prov. xxiii. 26. The heart of man must be first touched, opened, and possessed by the Spirit of Christ, before he can make an entire and solemn surrender of it into the hands of the Lord; and whoever is enabled to do this, not only performs it by a supernatural power, but may assure himself of his sonship with Christ: he that impartially, and without mental reservation, gives his heart to Christ, must be an heir of Christ.

4. I was greatly taken with Christ in his being precious to my soul; and I find this to be among the discriminating characters of them that truly believe: to such the Apostle Peter tells us, *he is precious*, 1 Pet. ii. 7. and here my hope for glory, I apprehend, is made stedfast; and when Christ has been remarkably so to my soul, I have longed to be at home, and wished for *the wings of a dove, that I might fly away, and be at everlasting rest*, Ps. lv. 6. and nothing would have been so welcome to me then as death; but alas! this has not been always my experience, since I have known the grace of God in truth: at some seasons I have shuddered and trembled at the thoughts of it; but since the Lord has weighed me out fresh trials and afflictions, and given me his presence when in the furnace, I have been more established in the covenant of grace; afflictions have been sweet seasons to my soul; having enjoyed the Lord in them, they have been his candle to discover my darkness, and to bring me into his light: never has Christ been more precious to my soul than now, nor his word more sweet and savoury: I have now found him to be my safe rest indeed, *the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*, Isa. xxxii. 2. he has taken my burdens off my shoulders, and spoke peace to my soul in the blood of the everlasting covenant; my heart hath been so upon Christ, my treasure, that I could scarce think upon any thing else; my meditation was sweet upon him, and his company to me was the most entertaining, sleeping and waking still with the Lord; a sweet, large, and composing portion to my soul: oh! by what tongue can these joys of the saints be expressed!

5. I was greatly taken with Christ, as being my King, as well as Prophet and Priest; and I desire that he would always sway the sceptre in my soul, and suffer no rival there: I delight

in his laws, his government, and rule; and not only in the pleasing prospect of his driving out, and destroying all my inbred enemies at last, but in his power in subduing and keeping them under at present, not suffering them to reign nor domineer: when corruptions sensibly rise from the old corrupt fountain, and begin to stir themselves, it is the grief and trouble of my soul; and I beg of the Lord to keep them down, and keep me watchful.

6. I was greatly taken with contentment in Christ and all his dealings, having been enabled to choose him as my whole and entire salvation. A view of interest in Christ, tends to reconcile the mind of a child of God to all his dispensations, teaches the soul to think and say, that it is all well with him; that his heavenly Father is wise in heart, and that his wisdom as well as his power is concerned for him, and stands ever engaged to bring good out of every apprehended evil. Cannot it be supposed, that a spirit of discontent can prevail with a believer, when he is under the witnessing of God's Spirit, and no intervening cloud between God and his soul: when he is satisfied of covenant relation with him, and the certainty of his person being secured in Christ from everlasting, he can read his name written in heaven, and by faith see it wrote upon the breastplate of Christ, and that he is graven upon the palms of his hands, set as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm, and that his best things are seated on high, beyond the reach of every adversary. Ask the man that has known this, how it was with him under such enjoyments. He will tell you he was enabled to submit cheerfully to the will of God, and thought, for the time, no evil of his dealing with him in the affairs of this world, but that he hath done all things well.

"I was content," says he, "with Christ my portion, had I been deprived of even bread and water: as long as I have the bread and water of life, this satisfies my soul; the fountain Christ is open, and I have enough, though the springs of all creature-comforts should be dried up: here I am content with adversity and afflictions, and can welcome the cross, shame, and disgrace for Christ; and, with a thankful heart, bless the Lord for these mercies, for I esteem them such."

Thus have I related a little of my experience in this affair, as I thought upon the query; which if the person that proposed it, cannot exactly fall in with, yet if he can make out his faith in Christ; his trusting in him alone for salvation; his venturing upon him; his finding him precious to his soul; his being called by efficacious grace; his having the genuine fruits and

effects of it, or the things which accompany salvation; his being a sharer of the love of God as it is free, rich, discriminating mercy, and of his good pleasure, which he proposed in himself, Eph. i. 9. called his choice in Christ before the foundation of the world, Eph. i. 4. an ordination to eternal life, Acts xiii. 48. an appointment to salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thess. v. 9. the foundation of God and his seal, 2 Tim. ii. 19. a setting apart, Ps. iv. 3. his having mercy on whom he will have mercy, Rom. ix. 18. the favour that he bears to his people, Ps. cvi. 4. a graving upon the palms of his hands, Isa. xlix. 16. if so, he may warrantably conclude, that he is justified, his sins pardoned, and he accepted in the Beloved.

W. D.

A Supplement to the foregoing Answer.

When I take my pen in my hand, it is not because I am inclined, or disposed to censure Mr. W. D. No; his doctrinal sentiments I approve of. What he has delivered of his experience, I look upon to be agreeable to scripture, and love to read the experience of solid, savoury, and pious persons: by it my soul has been often affected and benefited; and I have read what he has wrote with a good deal of satisfaction: I am glad to see it, and hope it will be of use to others. But I trust it will be no offence, if I declare it to be my opinion, that the experience of no person upon earth can be a common standard to another. The sacred scripture only is, and ought to be, the infallible touchstone. I apprehend that the experience of saints differ as their faces do. *There are differences of administrations, and diversities of operations*; yet, as the good work in all is begun and carried on by the Holy Spirit, it is unreasonable to suppose that the experience of every believer will, and doth agree in the main part; as there is a great similarity in every man's countenance, notwithstanding all the difference. I am fully persuaded, that many of the Lord's people, while they be young in years, and younger in graces, are warm in their affections, zealous in their profession, fervent and frequent in prayer, comfortable in their soul, and circumspect in their conduct: in short, their love to Jesus is strong; they love his name and person; they admire his early and unchangeable love, the freeness, sufficiency, and riches of his grace; they delight in his ordinances and truths; they rejoice in his salvation: neither are they afraid or ashamed of his cross; so they may answer in most particulars to what Mr.

W. D. has observed. But then, I am as fully persuaded, that many of the flock of Christ, though beloved, chosen, redeemed, and called, have very different experience at the beginning of their spiritual pilgrimage. Here I design to be so free as to give a short sketch of my own experience, hoping and praying it may be of some use to the weak and hindmost of the travellers through the wilderness.

It is above twenty years since I began to be seriously thoughtful about a future state, though I had been from my very infancy kept from open vice and gross immorality, for which I would be very thankful while I have breath, yet I had no relish, but rather aversion to true religion and real piety. I was not without some convictions now and then, yet they were not abiding. Thus I spent the first twenty years of my time to very little purpose in the world, and have more than once looked upon it as so much precious time lost. I remember well, that the conversion and visible alteration in the life and conversation of some young people of my age and acquaintance, did sensibly and closely affect my mind, so that I was brought to think, *what would become of me?* I soon after began to pray, hear, read, think, and converse about religion with more relish, feeling, and concern, than in time past; and of course I soon did forsake former unprofitable company, and other vanities of youth. So there was a change wrought in me, by steps or degrees almost imperceptible. But notwithstanding all this, my comforts were not many, my joy was not great; but my love to Jesus Christ was, in my apprehension, exceeding weak, my affections for heaven very languid, my heart very hard, and I was generally much straitened and very dull in prayer: nay, I have often greatly questioned my state, from my barrenness in prayer, and that for many years thus thinking, *If I were a child of God, surely I should have more freedom and liberty to speak to my Father.* I did, after a while, partake of the Lord's supper, under a persuasion of duty; but still I was very little affected. My discouragements every way were numerous, yet I was, by some means or other, enabled to continue in the path of duty, though I much doubted whether any thing of a real saving work was begun on my soul. When I would read, or hear the experience of others, expressed much in the same manner, as Mr. W. D. does his, and found so little of it in myself, my doubts would greatly increase; but still I went on, feebly praying, and faintly hoping. Many times did I hear, or read of others crying and complaining in Job's words, *O that I were as in months past, as in the*

days when God preserved me; when his candle did shine upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, Job xix. 2, 3. But that was never my complaint to this day. My longings and desires were for better times, more life and light, stronger love, warmer zeal, clearer evidence, and sweeter comforts than ever I had yet been indulged with. Thus I continued for the most part of twenty years, though not without some ebbings and flowings. My deadness and formality in private prayer for about twelve years of that time, or upwards, few would believe it, I think, were I to relate particulars; yet through all, there was something of the savour of religion kept up in the soul, and I durst not forsake the little I had. I prayed then in my weak way for many things; but my unbelief in prayer was very prevalent, for I hardly expected to receive what I prayed for: nay, I did often rather conclude, or at least fear, I never should. How often did I doubt in prayer! poor shattered prayer indeed! I had many causes of complaint, but little heart to do it. I found more ability, by far, to trust God with my temporal concerns, than to lay hold on Jesus Christ and all his fulness, or to be satisfied about my eternal state, that concern was so weighty; whether God had undertaken for me, was the great question. Nevertheless, I certainly was like the four lepers at the gate of Samaria: I was resolved to depend upon Christ, let what would follow: I did choose, if I must perish, to perish waiting upon, and longing for Christ, rather than to die in a course of wilful rebellion against him: though he should slay me, I would wait and hope to the end. Thus for many years I had but little comfort, nor was I despairingly distressed with terrifying fears; but I was not easy and unconcerned, though too lifeless in my soul. I think it needless to proceed any further to relate my own barrenness; no matter how few of the Lord's people do tread the same path: yet I must make this observation, that in all this time there was rather an increase than a decrease in life and religious favour, when I consider things in the general; so that I never long wished for former experience, but wanted to press forward, though so weak and heartless. Surely the glory of all my salvation is to be rendered unto God, and I am very desirous it should.

I will not at this time, produce any arguments to prove, that I am justified, &c. I look upon the way, mentioned by Mr. W. D. to be safe and good, for those who are favoured with the same experience as that mentioned by him. But I believe

there are others, who, when they read the comfortable experience of good men, are so discouraged and cast down, that they are ready to conclude, they are not justified, that their sins are not pardoned, and that they are not accepted with God, because they feel not in themselves what they hear others do feel and enjoy. This greatly daunts them, and they fear to think seriously of death and an awful eternity. They know not what to do.—Chiefly for the sake of these weak brethren of mine, I write this; therefore to such I beg leave to show my opinion upon the important point.

Thou weak and fearful believer—If thou art so concerned about thy future state and eternal happiness, and thy mind enlightened so far as to perceive the vileness of sin, and to bewail thy own vileness because of sin;—if thou seest the suitableness of Christ, as a Redeemer, to deliver thee from all the dreadful curses of a good and holy law, which thou liest exposed to for sin;—if thou art brought to depend upon Christ with all thy soul, for thy whole salvation;—if the little hope in Christ, which thou hast, doth humble thee, and encourage thee to obedience;—if thy soul doth long after perfect holiness;—and if the thought of the probability of salvation, freely by grace through Jesus Christ, does give thee some ease and satisfaction, and animate thee to pray, to purity of heart and life, &c.

My dear friend, if this is thy case, I will be confident to say unto thee, *Son, or daughter, be of good cheer; thy manifold sins be forgiven thee.* But methinks I do, as it were, hear the good man or woman, with a trembling heart, ready to answer, *Alas! my eternal salvation is so weighty a concern, that I know not how to take your word for it.* I can in that sensibly feel with thee. However, go on still, as I did: I can tell thee, that, through great mercy, I have been for some time much better satisfied about the state of my soul than in years past: I did for several years believe certainly, that the Lord might be pleased, some time or other, to administer comfort to such unworthy dust as me; and even still, I believe and hope, I may yet be favoured with clearer views of things, by far, than I have now, before I leave the wilderness. Lord, help me to be humble, and go forward, leaning upon Christ, and to take poor, weak believers with me by the hand! Therefore, my friend, look up, and do not be dejected; there is yet hope in Israel concerning thee.

But further, one part of the query above mentioned is, *How many ways doth God take, according to scripture, to give evidence and comfort of justification, &c.* It has been already

observed, that there are diversities of operations by the same Holy Spirit; and I believe that may be safely applied to the present case: but, among writers, two more general ways are taken notice of, viz. by the *direct*, or by the *reflex* act of faith. The direct act is, a looking directly unto Christ, as set forth in the gospel, in the fulness and freeness of his grace, in his capacity, ability, compassion, and readiness to receive poor sinners, let them be ever so much pressed down with their guilt, and a wounding, humbling sense of their vileness, helplessness, unworthiness, rebellion, &c. This, I believe, was the case with the thief on the cross, the jailer, with a great number of those whose conversion is mentioned in the New Testament; and I am persuaded, is the case with many to this day. The gospel comes in power, under the special influence of the Holy Ghost, and in *much assurance*. They are enabled to believe the gospel report, and to lay hold on it as their own precious portion, and that with joy and thankfulness. This blessing has been afforded to many soon after their first enlightening, as the Thessalonians and others. But the Lord is pleased to work in this powerful manner upon some, who have been a considerable time under real soul concern. These persons do not consider and depend upon former experience, as they do on the Lord's present dealings and free promises, the ability they find in themselves to believe in Christ as their own Saviour and precious Redeemer, the warmth of their affection to him and his ways, and their love to his cross so far as to despise any shame upon his account; they being comfortably and safely persuaded of their justification, that their sins are pardoned, and they accepted with God.

The *reflex* act of faith is, a looking back, and seriously considering the dealings of God with the soul in time past, viz. What convictions have been experienced, what impressions have been made on the heart, what light received in the understanding, what change in the will and affection, and what alteration in the mind. So upon an impartial search, they find that old things, in a great measure, are passed away, and all things wear a new complexion; therefore, they conclude they are *new creatures*. They say, with Manoah's wife, thus, *If the Lord did not design my salvation, he would not have wrought these things upon my heart*:—if Christ had not loved me, and given himself for me, I had never loved him as I do;—if I had not some real love to him, I should never be so uneasy that I do not love him more, and so jealous lest other objects should steal away my affections;—if I had not been a

child of God, my experience could not agree in so many particulars with that of the Old and New Testament saints. They loathed themselves; they bewailed their sinfulness; they hated vain thoughts; they sometimes refused to be comforted; they could hardly speak or look up, iniquities did so prevail; they had such a quick sense of sin, when they would do good, evil was present; the flesh lusted against the holy wishes, desires, and longings of the spirit, where the spirit was willing the flesh was weak, so they could not find how to perform that which was good. These particulars, and many more of the same nature, I find recorded in scripture, and expressed by eminent saints as their own experience. Thus the believer, upon comparing notes, will soon agree with former saints in complaints. He can also join with them in prayer, saying, *Create a clean heart in me, let my spirit be renewed, O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!* open thou mine eyes, &c. By this close and impartial reasoning, and comparing themselves with scripture, many come to enjoy a comfortable view of their justification, pardon of sin, and acceptance with God. I look upon this to be a safe and scripture way. The Apostle puts believers upon diligence, that they might enjoy the comfort of their election in life, and leave the world in full joy. The first epistle of John is full of this kind of reasoning and concluding, see ch. ii. 3—10, &c. ch. iii. 3. 10. 14. 17. 24. ch. iv. 12, 13. 19. ch. v. 2, 3. 13. Now in the direct and reflex act of faith, it is the Holy Spirit only that can enable to believe aright, for it is his proper work to *comfort and seal*. And I am persuaded he condescends to seal in both these ways; and I do believe he doth often join these together. He that is enabled to believe in the direct way, casting himself wholly and immediately upon Jesus Christ, and his fulness, if he lives any time after in the world, should look that his character and conduct answer to scripture, lest after all he should be under a delusion, for Satan is artful. Some have thought their faith of this kind to be right, when, alas! they did too much resemble those mentioned in Jude, ver. 4. 8. 10, 11, 12, &c. Again, he that receives comfort from the reflex act of faith, should by no means neglect the direct looking unto Jesus for justification, pardon, and acceptance; otherwise he will be grievously perplexed, and a legal spirit will steal in. The believer should be like those living creatures full of eyes before and behind.

Obj. Should not a person always have some particular promise set home upon his soul with a particular energy, before

he can receive any comfortable and safe evidence of his justification, &c. such as, *I have blotted out thy sins*, or some promise of that kind.

Ans. Many have had comfortable and satisfactory evidences that way; but perhaps others have rejected good evidences, because not brought to them in the same manner. If a person finds his heart enabled to depend upon Christ, and a willingness to devote himself to his service, yielding himself to the Lord; upon the whole scope and authority of the gospel, I think his foundation quite safe, and that he should not fear to receive comfort. We may be sure that Satan may, and often doth, apply scripture to deluded minds, in order to secure them more and more in their delusions. See this bold attempt upon the Lord of life and glory, Mat. iv. 6. I think that in 2 Kin. ix. 36. and x. 10. little better. We are not always to depend upon particular scriptures brought to our mind, except they incline us to love Christ, for the Holy Spirit always leads us to Jesus: if the scriptures brought to, and fastened on our mind, render our hearts tender of the glory of God; if we are, by their influence, made more humble, holy, and resigned to the will of God, and disposed to deny our self-will, take up the cross, and follow Christ; then we may trust that those scriptures are applied by the good Spirit: likewise, if we find in ourselves this disposition upon the general scope of scripture, it may answer the same end.

Now upon the whole, these observations seem to me true, viz.

That some of the people of God have much comfort soon after regeneration, though afterwards much darkness and gloominess may prevail. This observation should excite comfortable persons to be very watchful and humble.

That others of the heirs of glory may be very weak at the beginning, and continue heartless and dejected a long while; and yet be growing in grace, so that in process of time they are filled with joy and peace in believing.

That those who enjoy a comfortable measure of evidence, should not despise the weak and feeble; and conclude they are graceless, because their fears and doubts are so many. Those that stand, should take heed lest they be left of God, and fall.

That those who are much in the dark about their future state, and often in great fear about it, should not be overmuch dejected and cast down, but lift up their heads, trust in Christ,

pray to God, consider the nature of his promises, and hope for better times. *Others out of weakness were made strong, and why not they?*

That persons may be much straitened in prayer, and other religious exercises, and yet be new creatures.

That if many believers have experienced much more than I ever did, I should not from thence conclude myself an unbeliever. If I do now experience what I did not formerly, why may I not hope that I may yet experience much more than I do now? the possibility should excite and animate me to prayer, hope, believe, and the diligent use of means.

That some may well remember the time and means of their effectual calling; but the work upon others has been so gradual, that they cannot point out either: but if a person is enabled to conclude, that he is called by the grace of God, he should give the glory to the Author of his salvation, and not perplex himself about times and seasons.

That every believer should pray for, and expect a clear and comfortable evidence of his interest in Christ, and more spiritual joy.

That the Holy Spirit has divers ways to seal believers; but all, according to scripture, leading to Christ and a holy life. He that nameth the name of Christ, should depart from iniquity.

A Second Answer.

IN this judicious and useful query, I doubt not but the pious inquirer intended to put the sin-burdened and disconsolate soul upon the most effectual and speedy method for receiving peace and consolation, nothing being so conducive to the relief and comfort of an awakened conscience, and almost-despairing sinner, as the proof and evidence of its justification, pardon, and acceptance with God; but to come at the knowledge of these things, it is essential that we know what the things are. To justify, pardon, and accept, are God's acts of justice and mercy towards ungodly sinners, through the obedience and merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, exclusive of their good works, Rom. iii. 26. and iv. 5. *To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly: not that God justifies sinners as ungodly, nor for their ungodliness, but from their sin, as the redeemed of Christ, who was made sin for them, that they*

might be made the righteousness of God in him. Christ, being their surety, had all their sins transferred unto him; was chargeable with, and answerable for them; was treated by the justice of God as if he had been the vilest sinner; was condemned unto death, made a sacrifice; and, in order to atone for sin, died in the room and stead of his people, and by dying made satisfaction; rose again their Head and Representative, was legally discharged, acquitted, and justified, and they in him. Hence it is evident, that our sins were the matter and meritorious cause of Christ's condemnation, and his obedience, &c. of our justification; for *by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous*, Rom. v. 19. But no man can know his interest in these things, without the faith of the operation of God, and the spirit's revealing Christ's righteousness as the matter of our justification, &c. therefore are we said to be justified by faith; not that faith justifies, but is the means or eye by which we see ourselves justified through Christ, and so have peace with God. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*: we live and walk by it, and can see things at a great distance from us. Abraham looked forward, and saw Christ's day at about two thousand years distance: thousands since have looked back to Christ's death and merit, who also are looking forward to his coming, kingdom, and glory, when we shall see him as he is, be like him, and for ever with him. But God, according to the scripture, gives the evidence and comfort of these things many ways. And then,

1. That awakening, faith-creating, and soul-renewing power, the preached word has upon poor sinners, by which they are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, is a scriptural and certain evidence of election, justification, pardon, acceptance, and eternal salvation. Let this be observed as a certain maxim, that whoever or whatever proves the sinner's election, doth at the same time prove his justification, and all the concomitant blessings of salvation, from the foundation to the topstone, 1 Thess. i. 4, 5. Rom. viii. 30. *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God: for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.—Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* Then if called, we may with comfort conclude, we are saved; for calling, according to God's purpose, is the effect of a previous salvation in Christ, and in order to a future salvation with him, 2 Tim.

i. 9. *Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

2. The nature and influence of faith, is an evidence which God gives, according to, and by the scripture, of our justification, Gal. v. 6. *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.* Now, if our faith influence us to love Christ, because we believe he hath first loved us, and do experience Christ precious, (for so he is to them that believe,) then is our faith of the right kind, and we are justified according to Acts xiii. 39. *And by him all that believe are justified from all things.*

3. The witness within is an evidence which God gives of our sonship, pardon, and acceptance, testified by the scriptures, for our consolation and comfort, 1 John v. 10. *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.* God's Spirit is the cause of faith, and proof of adoption. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* Can we call God, Father, we surely are his children, and accepted according to that scripture, Eph. i. 5, 6, 7. *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

4. Love to the brethren, is an evidence according to scripture, 1 John iii. 14. *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* Not because we love them that are brethren, as men, as relations, or as friends; this may be done from selfish and carnal principles: but if we love them purely as they are brethren, because God loved and chose them, Christ loved and died for them, and because we see the image of Christ in them, we love them for Christ's sake, as Christ's disciples; then are we passed from death unto life, viz. from a state of sin to a state of grace, in order for a state of glory, which God will give; grace and glory being inseparably connected together, Ps. lxxxiv. 11. *The Lord God is a sun and shield: he will give grace and glory.*

5. A being willing to forsake all for Christ, to be saved alone by him, is an undoubted evidence, according to scripture, of pardon and salvation through him. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power—And whoever will, let him take*

the water of life freely. If we are desirous to part with sin, the world, and all its good things; to be cast on Christ as perishing sinners thirsting for no other salvation; we are come to Christ, so must and shall be saved by him—*Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.* *The Lord of hosts hath sworn, &c.* God hath given his word and oath to confirm this truth.

Therefore we may venture upon the security, and it is impossible for God to lie, we have strong consolation who are fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us; whatever our case, trials, and fears have been, or are, we are safe in Christ, and may with as much comfort and certainty conclude upon the enjoyment of heaven, as if already there. Ps. cx. 3. Rev. xxii. 17. John vi. 37. Isa. xiv. 24. Heb. vi. 18.

A Third Answer.

THE witness of the Spirit of Christ, is that by which a person may know *that he is justified, his sins pardoned, and he accepted with God, &c.* This is part of that unction with which the people of God are anointed, as they are one with Christ which abideth in them, and teacheth them all things necessary to be known, and of which there is no lie, 1 John ii. 27. Notwithstanding, I grant that though there may be many shining advantages, that have attended, and ever will, either more or less, attend the subjects of such special enjoyment, it is impossible for the soul, however near the throne he may be, and whatever language he may have acquired, and be master of, to declare and explain the one-half that is felt and experienced in the heart; something he can speak, though but little comparatively, and may say of the witness of the Spirit, as the queen of Sheba of Solomon's wisdom, &c. *It was a true report that I heard in mine own land,* 1 Kin. x. 6. The Spirit of Christ dwells in all his people; and without it, it will be difficult to prove justification, &c. nay, without this, they cannot be Christ's, Rom. viii. 9. without this, no adoption can be proved, ch. viii. 14, 15, 16. without this, no sanctification can be manifested; and, consequently, no right to eternal life, 1 John iv. 13. 1 Cor. i. 30. The indwelling of the Spirit, and the witness of the Spirit, are two different things: the former may be where the latter is not manifest; and the former may be where it is not known to be the subject, but questioned, doubted, and feared: but it is not so with the latter, which carries more or less its own evidence with it: *the wind bloweth;*

where it listeth, John iii. 8. *He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true*, v. 33. The former is the mercy of every child of grace, whether sensible of it or not, and which always abides and works as the Spirit of grace; but so it cannot always be said of the latter; by which I would mean it is not every child's mercy: and though upon the former the salvation of God's people is connected, yet their salvation do not depend upon the knowledge of it, though much of their present comfort does; and when the Spirit witnesseth with their spirits, as to the certainty of the work, it causes evangelical joy, boldness, strength, and large sips and foretastes of that everlasting consolation flowing from a Christ-wrought experience; which being begun here, will never leave them, even when safely wafted over the tempestuous billows of time, into those mansions that Christ, as the forerunner, is gone to prepare for them: and therefore whoever has enjoyed this witness-bearing of the Spirit, may rest satisfied that he is justified, his sins pardoned, and he accepted with God; and he may be sure of it on these three accounts.

I. Because the witness of the Spirit is a great witness; it is the moving, breathing, stirring up, and secret declaring unto our spirits, our right of sonship, our being *children, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*, Rom. viii. 17. and it may be called *great* with respect to its author, its power, and effects: if the subjects of it are tempted, tried, persecuted, and charged mistakenly with being hypocrites, they can herein rejoice, and say with Job, *Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high*, Job xvi. 19. This witness may be where there is no particular portion of the word applied: it is applied sometimes in a more secret way, though never contrary to it; it is always consistent with the gospel of Christ, which is the evidence of its veracity, as it is the pure word of God, revealed by him, indited by his Spirit, and handed down to us by holy men of God: but the latter has here the pre-eminence, as says the Apostle, *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater*, 1 John v. 9. *And he that believeth hath the witness in himself*, v. 10. the person that has been favoured with this, knows it to be true: as the man that has tasted sugar, can say it is sweet; so he that has enjoyed this witness, knows it to be exceeding great, for there is no witness equal to it.

II. Because the witness of the Spirit is a peaceable witness; it quiets and silences all the rough and surging waves that before appeared in the soul; it comes not empty handed, neither

does it deal in a scanty way: these consolations of God are not small, Job xv. 11. and why is it so? Because it is conveyed by Christ as a gift of the covenant: he makes it known, he brings it home, reveals it, sprinkles it upon the conscience, testifies of it, preaches it as a sure and certain blessing, lodged in the arms of everlasting love, without any view to creature acts and performances; and however a child of God may be backslidden, brought into bondage, and in an hour of desertion tempted to think the contrary, yet has he received the mercy in days past, been made thankful for it, as its true and genuine consequence, however it may be at present with him, these mercies will be returned again, for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints, *but let them not return again to folly*, Ps. lxxxv. 8.

III. Because the witness of the Spirit is a perfect witness; and if nothing more than this could be produced, this itself is sufficient, and a nervous argument, containing in its bowels a solid foundation, whereon a believer may rely, and make out that he is justified, &c. for as Moses declares, in his song, *he is the rock, his work is perfect*, Deut. xxxii. 4. and this is further confirmed to the experience of faith, four ways:

1. Faith receives the witness; this takes it as the gift of God; it looks not only upon it, but as a special hand it handles it, in the way of its bestowment, and is enabled to use it for its service; rejoice in it more than those that find great spoil, and is entertained with the enabling power that is given with it: for *as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God*, John i. 12.

2. Faith eyes the witness;—it views it in its pleasing prospects in Jesus Christ, with its nature, properties, and excellencies, as supported and increased by him; it eyes the witness as an earnest of the heavenly inheritance, as the fruit of that love which is the foundation of every blessing we now enjoy, and are in expectation of; as the rest into which those that believe are now entered, Heb. iv. 3.—as one of the privileges of those, that are not only sons, but sons in hope, for it does not yet appear what we shall be, 1 John iii. 2.—As a part, though but a small part comparatively, of that light which is sown for the righteous, Ps. xcvii. 11.—as a token for good from the Lord, which the most eminent saints in every age have been concerned with him for at the throne of grace, Ps. lxxxvii. 17.—as part of that goodness, which is laid up in promise and covenant contract for them that fear the Lord, and as to its nature and worth called great, Ps. xxxi. 19.—as the

shining of the light of his countenance, and special presence, with whom there is fulness of joy, Ps. xvi. 11.—as that help which encourages the saints to trust and confide in the Lord, after they have lost something of the sweetness and savour of his refreshments upon their soul, Ps. lxiii. 7.—as that which increases their thirst for God, in consequence of his pouring water upon them, and floods according to his promise, Isa. xlv. 3. in a word, faith eyes the witness, as given freely, wholly, and entirely, the same as the blood of the everlasting covenant, Heb. xiii. 20. the precious blood of atonement, Rom. v. 9, 10, 11. without money and without price, Isa. lv. 1.

3. Faith holds the Lord to the witness; its genuine language is as I have found it in my soul, *though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*, Job xiii. 15. this it does, or rather is empowered to do, sometimes under sharp trials and conflicts, when the fig-tree does not blossom, and a poor believer is crying out, *Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage*, Mic. vii. 1. but all this, and much more, cannot hinder that strength which is given from Christ, whereby the soul pleads what God has promised, as Jacob did, *and thou saidst, I will surely do thee good. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*, Gen. xxxii. 12. 26. and like unto the spouse, *I held him, and would not let him go*, Cant. iii. 4.

4. Faith resteth upon the witness, as it is the witness of him that cannot lie, and in full assurance of the same, *draweth near to God*, Heb. x. 22. I have insisted upon the witness of the Spirit of Christ at this time, because this is an undoubted testimony of the truth of justification, of which it cannot be said of many other things; and whatever soul is made partaker of the same, is not only happy now, and highly favoured of the Lord, but will be so for ever and ever: and as the weakest saints are as dear and precious to Jesus Christ as the strongest, but for want of these gracious visits in that full and satisfactory way, are often kept low, and in the dark, suspicious and questioning their interest in his love; and no other reason, that is substantial, can be assigned for it, but it is the pleasure of their heavenly Father: for this and some other reasons, I shall mention a few things, to show why many of God's dear children are so troubled about it, viz. for the want of the witnessing of the Spirit of Christ with their spirits, that they are his children. And,

(1.) Some are troubled about it, because the witness of the Spirit is the ownings of Christ: they are sensible of this from

the word of God; and for want of the enjoyment of the same, life is often more unpleasant than what it would otherwise be: they cannot be so content, nor satisfied with the dealings of providence, nor with the will of the heavenly Father: nay, they are afraid to speak of him, under that endearing character and relation; and sometimes in the room of that, they are tempted to think themselves vessels of wrath, that are only ripening and preparing to be shut up in the prison of hell: the darkness they find in their souls, they take to be the forebodings and presages of eternal darkness. When they are in company with those that live at the fountain-head, and hear them relate their experiences, they are ready to tremble, and are often obliged to be silent, secretly wishing, with Job, that they *knew where they might find Him*, (the Lord,) Job xxiii. 3. Had they the witnessing of his Spirit, this would be Christ's owning of them: indeed, this would be his naming of them, Isa. xliii. 1.—his owning of them for his jewels, Mal. iii. 17.—his counting of them, as those born of him, and writing of them up, Ps. lxxxvii. 6. and it will not be denied, by those that know the love of Christ in their souls, and what grace in its operations means, that the witnessing of the Spirit is some of the ownings of Christ, and his unsearchable riches, which a child of God, being persuaded of from the word, and in times past experiencing, but now not enjoying, is rather doubtful, and in great confusion, and perplexity in the soul; which may be the case, at times, of most of them that are saved in and by Christ, with an everlasting salvation; for it is not always a child of God remembering his past experience of the witness of the Spirit, that will afford him comfort and consolation, but when the Lord remembers it to him.

(2.) Some are troubled about it, because the witness of the Spirit is the joy and gladness of Christ to the soul; for this is the native and genuine production thereof: these seasons, some few know at least, to be the heart-enlivening and Christ-exalting seasons; and wherever this is savingly discovered, namely, the witness before specified, it will either more or less be attended with joy or gladness, in either one or each of these four following things: 1. In meditation: for nothing like this prepares the soul for it, as it lays before the understanding the beauty and excellency of the word, and a more than ordinary glory appears than in the sacred pages in general; the truth of which is evident in the experience of the Psalmist, —*My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord*, Ps. civ. 34. And as it arises from this, it is a certain

proof, that all that joy and gladness that is not put in the heart by the Lord, is deceivable and false, Psal. iv. 7.—2. In prayer, the witness of the Spirit produces joy, and gladness also; and if ever God's children pray, it is now: here, they speak intimately with the Lord, can call him *Father*, and *the guide of their youth*, Jer. iii. 4. now they are free and open-hearted with him, and can unbosom their very souls to him.—3. In the house or church of Christ here below, the witness of the Spirit produces joy and gladness, which makes the saints delight so in, love, and long after it: *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth*, Psal. xxvi. 8. now *a day in his courts is better than a thousand*, Ps. lxxxiv. 10. and under this enjoyment they would be glad to abide: their converse now is with things within the veil; and, with Peter they say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*, Mat. xvii. 4.—4. The witness of the Spirit produces joy and gladness in the belief of the complete and perfect enjoyment in the church above; the thoughts of the dissolution of the body, is so far from being terrible and shuddering, (as is sometimes the case when the soul is in bondage,) that it is rather delightful and entertaining to be with Christ, which is far better, to be filled with joy and gladness in the perfection of it, and that which will arise from immediate views and unclouded prospects of their dear and exalted Redeemer, as there will be no more complaints of the want of the witness, the hidings of Christ's face, the hardness of their hearts, the damp that at times, in this state of imperfection, attends their spirits,) their sun being eclipsed, and at times seeming to be quite set,) for here it will never go down, neither will it ever be withdrawn, for the Lord will be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended, Isa. lx. 20. and from these hints, gracious souls will be ready to set to their seals, that from the witness of the Spirit, joy and gladness is produced in the respects before mentioned, as it proceeds from Jesus Christ, called *the faithful witness*, Rev. i. 5. and *the faithful and true witness*, ch. iii. 14.

(3.) Some are troubled about it, that is, they do not enjoy the witness of the Spirit, and they are distressed, as knowing that this witness is the bread of life; others partake of it, they find it to be so: but as for those they think they must perish with hunger; they go on heavily, and look sadly for want of it; they refuse to be comforted, and manifest it by *hanging their harps upon the willows*, Ps. cxxxvii. 2. and are at a loss, how to *sing the Lord's song in a strange land*, v. 4. and it may

be noted for a wonder, if a spark of envy does not sometimes arise in their minds towards their brethren, that go on so comfortably, and walk in the light, while darkness is about their own tabernacle; but as for those, that are under this witness, as it is the bread of life, they can plead these three things among others.

(1.) They plead the favour of Christ; and this is not the smallest part of their portion: *in his favour*, which is his presence, there *is life*, Ps. xxx. 5. they find it to be so; this is the life of their spirits, Isa. xxxviii. 16. the life of their faith, the life of their hope, the life of their patience, the life of their love, the life of their joy, the life of their expectations, the life of all the ordinances of Christ, the life of the word of Christ which dwells in them richly in all wisdom, Col. iii. 16. the life of hearing the word of Christ, the life of reading the word of Christ, the life of meditating on the word of Christ, the life of hiding and laying up the word of Christ, Ps. cxix. 11. the life of singing in the ways of Christ, Ps. cxxxviii. 5. the life of all the promises of Christ, 2 Pet. i. 4. the life of all afflictions and persecutions which was given them in Christ with calling grace, 2 Tim. iii. 12. and ch. i. 9. the life of living for Christ in the world, Phil. i. 21. the life of living upon Christ; and, in a word, in the favour of Christ is the life of all the enjoyments of Christ: and as they plead the favour of Christ, so when it is his sovereign will to withdraw from them, nothing is more melancholy, nor affecting to them: here they have sad and heart-disquieting hours, for when he hides his face their souls are troubled; as there is no beholding of him, though they are his children, when this is the case, Job xxxiv. 29.

(2.) They plead the seal of Christ; and the impressions of this are not easily forgotten by them: this is a confirmation to them of their acceptance in the beloved, which can never be reversed; such is the beauty that a promise appears in to a child of God, in the hands of the Spirit!

(3.) They plead the portion of Christ, or rather Christ as their portion;—can live upon him as such;—*whom have we in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that we desire beside thee*, Ps. lxiii. 25. is the native air in which they breathe, and the *new creation* addresses at the throne of grace: their pleading this under the weakness of the Spirit, makes them live like joint heirs of Christ, quite different persons and different lives, than the generality of mankind and professors do: this weans them from this world, makes them live above it;

they behold it and all creatures, when compared with Christ, as too mean, base, and sordid for them, and from which they are enabled to soar above, where they will quickly stand with white robes and palms in their hands, crying, with a loud voice, *Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*, Rev. vii. 9.

QUEST. XVI.

May a person with doubts of his regeneration, or personal interest in Christ, approach the table of the Lord, without being guilty of presumption?

THE point is important, and concerns many of the dear children of God; therefore it should be very seriously handled, judiciously discussed, and plainly resolved. I should be glad to see this done by an able hand, taught of God how to deal with babes in Christ. As the query has been so long depending, and no answer yet appeared, I humbly propose the following hints, lest the weak should be tempted to conclude, that they are despised or neglected.

The sum of the query is this: "May one partake of the Lord's supper, before he is indulged with undoubted assurance of personal interest in Christ?" It is easy to answer in the affirmative. If assurance of salvation were absolutely necessary to qualify for the Lord's table, then worthy communicants would be much fewer than they are; and was that the case, it would easily appear that our blessed Redeemer had appointed the sacred supper, not for the *babes* in his house, but for the *strong men* in his family: which would be very discouraging to the feeble-minded; and, I am persuaded, was very far from the design of the tender-hearted Shepherd, who is so mindful of his lambs, and so compassionate, that he gathers them in his arms, and carries them in his bosom.

But here, methinks, the next query will be, *What are the qualifications necessary to approach the Lord's table?* Answer, strictly speaking, I do not see that an unregenerate person has any right to that solemn ordinance. But it is possible, that

a person may be truly born again, and yet be perplexed with doubts and fears about his regeneration and personal interest in Christ. Now the qualifications necessary in a worthy communicant are things plain and evident; I reckon these to be the chief of them, viz.

To be so deeply convinced of sin, as to see its vile nature and fearful tendency, the just and eternal, as well as intolerable punishment it exposes to; his own utter inability to remove sin out of the way, or to cleanse himself from the defilements of it, and therefore the absolute necessity of a Redeemer.—To have such a knowledge of Christ as to be fully persuaded, that he is the only Saviour that can deliver from sin and punishment, and that there is no salvation but in and through Jesus Christ the Son of God.—To find an inward desire, inclination, disposition, and resolution to depend upon Christ alone for justification before God, pardon of sin, all needful grace here, and endless glory hereafter.—To love the Lord Jesus Christ, so far as to yield cheerful obedience to his commandments, ready submission to his will, as an evidence of unfeigned loyalty to him, as the only and rightful sovereign.—To find an inward hatred of sin, even the sin of the mind as well as that of the conversation; secret sin, as well as public iniquity.—To have the heart so tender of the glory of God, as to design, by divine grace assisting, to behave in the house of the Lord in a becoming manner; and in the whole of his life and conduct, to adorn his profession, testifying, by his pious, humble, and circumspect deportment, that he has forsaken the service and slavery of sin and Satan; but desires to be for ever a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, being neither afraid or ashamed to own his Master. To take the word of truth as the only rule of his belief and practice; and to look upon himself always as a poor, helpless, and unworthy creature, not able of himself to do any thing as he ought, but as assisted by grace and accepted through Christ.—These things imply, that the person's moral character is as becometh the gospel, whatever his station of life is. But furthermore,

Our view in coming to the Lord's table should be—to remember with a thankful heart, the meritorious death of Christ, his great and matchless love in shedding his precious blood to take away sin, as nothing else could possibly remove it out of the way.—To testify before all, that we look upon ourselves as poor, naked sinners, unworthy of any favour, and yet depend entirely and wishfully upon Jesus, as a crucified Saviour for eternal salvation.—To devote ourselves afresh unto

the Lord, every time we come, in a solemn manner before heaven and earth, saints and sinners, all that will see, friends and foes.—To evidence that we choose to be with the people of God here, in the church militant, as well as hereafter, in the church triumphant; to suffer reproach and affliction with them, and likewise to share in their privileges. To wait for more faith, comfort, and joy; to have a clearer sight of our personal interest in Christ, and to be sealed to the day of redemption.—To have our love to God, the Father of all our mercies; to Jesus, our dear Redeemer, the Author and Captain of our salvation; and to the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier of our soul and body, and the Comforter of our hearts, increased: our affections to holiness universally warmed and excited, and to have the power and vigour of sin weakened and withered; to have the old man, the body of sin effectually crucified. Finally, That we may grow in every grace, have repeated communication and fellowship with God, that our hearts and affections may be more weaned from the world, but more and more joined and cemented to those whom God hath chosen out of the world, who are the excellent of the earth, in whom all our delight should be; that we may see clearer, by faith, the glory of God in his temple, and be indulged with some fresh prospect and foretaste of the glory above, where saints shall be arrayed in white robes, drink the new wine, and for ever remember the death of Christ and all the fruit of his love, which will render the songs of Zion inexpressibly vigorous, melodious, and harmonious to the endless revolutions of eternity.

Now let a person examine himself regarding his experience of, and sincerity in, these things; then let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup: it is not presumption for him so to do; it is his duty and privilege, nay, it is his sin to neglect and disobey a precept so plain. It is his folly and imprudence to absent and deprive himself of a feast so rich, an entertainment so animating and refreshing. He may be confident that he discerns the Lord's body, in an acceptable manner, though his doubts and fears may be many still; yet let him come to the Supper which our blessed Lord hath instituted, to the table which he hath spread, for the encouragement, support, and nourishment of his people, the weak and timorous, as well as the strong and courageous. No man is of himself worthy of so great a privilege. A sight and sense of our unworthiness is one considerable qualification; but I would close with a word of advice:

1. To those who statedly partake of the Lord's supper. My dear friends, prize your precious privileges : rest not in, nor depend upon ordinances : as they should not be lightly esteemed, so they should not be idolized : look for bread for your souls at your Redeemer's table ; pray that you may grow in every grace, that the world may be convinced that you have been with Jesus. Examine yourselves impartially : before you receive, think where you are going ; and after, think where you have been : it is sad if gospel ordinances are dry breasts. Take care you do not prostitute and profane sacred institutions. Some do eat and drink at the table of the Lord, and yet in their conversation lift up their heels against him : but these, after all, shall go to their own place ; the door will be shut against such professors.

2. To those who come not to the Lord's table.—Of these, there are some who despise all divine ordinances, and wallow in sin ;—the Lord pity them, and open their eyes ! I do not expect them to read this, therefore shall not trouble them now with exhortations : but there are others who seem to stand about half-way between the Lord's flock and the profane herd. My friends, consider that our blessed Saviour on that agonizing night, in which his sweat was like great drops of blood ; in that night, for ever to be remembered of his people, he said, *Take, eat ;—Drink ye all of that cup—Do this in remembrance of me.*—Will you still say, No ? Why will you say so ? Have you not some darling sin you cannot part with ? Do you not think that Christ requires his disciples to be more holy than you choose to live ? O say to your idols, what have we to do more with you ? If fear and diffidence keep you back, pray for more strength ; ask advice of those you judge to be pious, faithful, and experimental. Do not indulge an indolent, lazy disposition. You complain of weaknesses, yet will not come for food ; you weaken the hearts of saints, but harden the hearts of sinners. You do yourselves an injury, and withdraw your shoulder from the yoke of Christ.

QUEST. XVII.

What means must a person use to attain to greater liveliness in devotional exercises, who is desirous of it, and mourns under a sense of his formality in them?

TO be lukewarm in prayer and other devotional exercises, ought much to be lamented, though something of it is to be expected, while any remainder of sin dwells in the believer. When that which is mortal is swallowed up of life, then farewell formality and indifferency!—farewell every depravity and disorder of soul and body!—then all complaints will cease for ever. But what shall be offered to the consideration of our pious querist, under his present circumstances? I humbly conceive, in this tender point, that these few interrogations should be duly weighed.

Do you not indulge some lust, that you know not how to part with? It is possible to mourn under, and because of, formality; and yet be fond of the very cause of that complaint. Do you follow so eager after the world, that your spirits and affections are quite spent upon it, and you utterly unfit for devotion? We should attend to our proper calling and business in life; yet not so as to neglect the worship of God, and lose our souls: the less should give place to the greater. Where the world is loved too much, those persons fall into snares and temptations, into many foolish and hurtful lusts. Are you given to that which the carnal man calls *pleasure*? Suppose, for instance, eating or drinking too freely; keeping company with those who are not friends to true religion; so that a light, vain, and worldly spirit quite prevails, but the vigour and relish of real devotion is withered, weakened, and wasted, if not quite lost: or allowing so much liberty in any other kind of voluptuousness, that sin is more excited than mortified; the sinews of sensuality strengthened, but the nerves of spirituality proportionably enfeebled.—Do you watch and pray against pride, self-conceit, peevishness, sourness, revenge, and other unruly passions and evil concupiscence? If these, or any of their kindred, but cursed lusts, are nourished and cloaked, they will soon introduce spiritual sloth: then the voice of Christ, of

conscience, of ministers, of providence, &c. will be heard but in a kind of a dreaming way. Christ will withdraw; the Spirit will be grieved; and we may mourn after an absent God many days. Then we are not to expect much liveliness in devotional exercises, for he that covereth or palliateth his sins shall not prosper. If iniquity is regarded and favoured, we are not to look for much life in prayer, nor any speedy answer to it. Because of our foolishness, we may be troubled, bowed down greatly, and go mourning all the day long. Sin sticketh very close, and lust is very deceitful. He that would be comfortable in his soul should be very open to conviction, saying sincerely and frequently, *Keep back thy servant—Search me, O God, and try me—Let the righteous smite me.*

Moreover, let the following hints be observed: He that meditates and delights in the word of God, day and night, shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water; he shall be green, vigorous, prosperous, and successful. We should meditate on, and endeavour steadily to believe free promises, such as these: *I will water it every moment—Thou shalt be like a watered garden—I will pour water upon him that is thirsty; he shall spring up as willows by the watercourses—I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his root as Lebanon: he shall revive us the corn, and grow as the vine:* with a vast number of like precious promises, which the man that wants life in his devotion may easily find out. We should meditate much upon the fulness and suitability of the grace treasured up in Christ, endeavouring to fix our eye of faith, though weak, upon his glory as Mediator, Head, Surety, and Intercessor: in so doing, we shall be more like him, and then more lively. We ought to consider his gracious invitations and encouragements to poor, dry, barren, and helpless souls; such as these: *Let not the stranger say, the Lord hath utterly separated me from his people, I am a dry tree: nay, but let him take hold of my covenant—I am as a green fir-tree, from me is thy fruit found—Come to the waters, eat that which is good, feed and live upon the sure mercies of David—Come to me all ye that labour, knowing not where to rest, and I will give you rest—If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink; I will in no wise cast him out.*

We should likewise observe conditional promises, which I look upon as adapted and intended to encourage, excite, and quicken to duty. These are few of them: *Blessed is he that watcheth daily at my gates—They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles*

—*If any one do his will, he shall know whether the doctrine be of God—He that keepeth my commandments, I will manifest myself unto him: if any one will love me, and keep my word, I and my Father will come to him, and make our abode with him.* —*If we follow on, to know the Lord, then, he will come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain upon the earth.* It might be of use to consider, closely, the great encouragement given to continue stedfast in prayer, in Luke xviii. 1, &c. and elsewhere. God's chosen may be left to cry for a space of time, day and night to their Father, who is in heaven, but he will at last hear, and grant their desire and request. Let us remember how saints of old acted, when it was low with them. The Psalmist doth express himself to this purpose: *Quicken me, O Lord—Make haste—Make no long tarrying, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest I be swallowed up; lest I perish: when they were weary with crying, when their throat was dried, though their eyes failed, yet they waited on the Lord—They persevered in seeking, when they could not find; to call, when they had no answer.* By and by, ere they were aware, they found their beloved, they held him, and would not let him go. There was life in devotion then.

We should pay due regard to all other appointed means. We should read with care, and attend the public solemnities of the house of God, hearing, praying, with other ordinances appointed for the reviving of believers. It would be our wisdom and advantage to embrace and improve every opportunity we can, to converse with those we judge to be skilful in experimental religion. In order to grow in grace, I think it not only expedient, but very necessary, to set apart some time to retire from the world, for prayer and communing with our own heart, besides our common time of devotion. Suppose an hour, or half an hour, every day, or every other day: if that cannot be, then twice a week; or once at least, as our circumstances will admit. Colonel Gardiner had his two hours every day,* viz. from four to six in the morning. In this time, our very spirit should make a diligent search, sifting ourselves as in the presence of God, to inquire into the true state of our souls; whether impairing or improving in grace: if impairing, What the cause? What the probable means of revival? What evidence for heaven? What corruption doth most easily beset us, what promises suit our cases best, what are our encouragements? And abundance of variety regarding our temporal and

* Dr. Doddridge's Life of Colonel Gardiner.

eternal state, and that of others, may employ us. I believe David had many sweet seasons of this kind in bed, and probably it is the case with many still; but young people, generally, and perhaps many others, find their ideas clearer, and themselves more lively, and fit to engage in so solemn a work, when out of bed. However, every one should consider the most proper seasons, according to their constitutions and various situations. Once more, it may have a tendency to quicken us in duty, to think of the loss we sustain, when cold and formal. We lose comfort, joy, satisfaction, nearness to God, and inexpressible delight. Let us think of the glory above, how active, how bright, and incessant! The flames of devotion burn there! Poor languid souls that we are!

But when all is done, we should carefully remember, and if we should forget it, yet we shall find feelingly that we are but like *dry bones* still, except the Holy Spirit is pleased to breathe upon us. Then we should beware lest we depend too much upon our own performances. Though we ought to wait in the path of duty, yet we mar our work, if we put that dependence on it which should be upon Christ only. If our souls are refreshed in the conscientious discharge of duty, the glory is the Lord's, and not ours: it is enough for us to have the comfort of it. When we are engaged in any part of divine worship, we should pray for the Spirit to assist, else we shall be like a becalmed ship. If after we have used the means with sincerity and due caution, we find deadness and formality still prevailing, let us keep on examining ourselves, praying, waiting, believing, and hoping. The vision will speak; if it tarry, we should wait for it, depending that it will neither lie nor deceive. *They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever.* Sometimes the Lord is pleased to break in upon his people, in a way of wonderful grace, mercy, and good-will, and revive them: at other times he rouses them up out of their lethargy, by terrible things, wounding and awful strokes which they little expected. Blessed be his name, he doth all well! May we be helped to acknowledge and forsake our sins, observe our duty, and not forsake our own mercies, and very valuable privileges!

QUEST. XVIII.

When, and wherein, may it be said, that believers do grieve and quench the Spirit?

We are to consider, that *grieving* and *quenching* the Spirit of God, are figurative terms, and that they must not be understood in a strict, literal, and proper sense. That the Holy Spirit of God is intended, appears evident from Eph. iv. 30. He can never grieve and change his mind, or suffer any mutations of affections or passions, as we do. When God is said to grieve at heart, to repent, with other similar expressions, it is a figure called anthropopathy, that is, speaking after the manner or affections of men. For instance, the Lord who sees all things, is represented as having eyes, because we see with our eyes; as having ears, because we hear with our ears; as having a mouth, because we speak with our mouth: so God is represented as having hands, fingers, back-parts, face, countenance, nostrils, heart, bowels, soul, &c. yet we must believe that God is a Spirit, and hath no body, parts, or passions. He is the Lord, and doth not change. We grieve because we have acted imprudently; or because of some event we could not foresee or prevent; or for some oppression and disappointment we did not expect, nor are we able to remove; or because of some consequence we fear. Neither of these can happen to the Holy Spirit. Then I humbly conceive, that the phrase *grieving the Spirit* denotes, that the conduct of believers towards God is such as would grievously vex man: and that God's dealings, in the course of his providence, will resemble the effect of grief, displeasure, anger, and resentment in man. So the Lord is said to hide himself, to hide his face, to depart, to chastise, &c. As a father doth chastise, frown upon, and depart from a child whose conduct has been very provoking and disobedient.

When the Spirit is supposed to be quenched, he is compared to fire; but it is a fire that can never be extinguished: yet he may, and often doth, suspend his gracious, enlightening, enlivening, and comforting operations and influences on the minds of his people.

These hints being intended by way of explanation, I proceed now to consider the query.

It may be observed, that the very same conduct in believers does both grieve and quench the Spirit: I believe that whenever we give place to the devil, we then grieve and quench the Spirit. When we love, set our affections upon, and pursue the things and concerns of this world immoderately; when we conform to the conduct of unbelievers, making their practice our rule more than the scripture; when we delight in their company and conversation; embracing the very spirit and temper of those who neither love nor fear God, we then grieve and quench the Spirit. When we are indifferent about faith in an exalted Redeemer, believing and attracting views of his riches and glorious grace, with our own personal interest therein; when we are careless about promoting the glory of God, living upon, and according to his promises, growth in every grace, communion and fellowship with, or endearing nearness to the Father and the Son, adorning the gospel of Christ and his ways, we may be said to grieve the Spirit. When we study more to gratify, nourish, cloak, and excuse the corruptions of our flesh and spirit, than to discover, mortify, destroy, and expel them; when close self-examination is neglected, when frequent exercises of faith and other graces of the Spirit are not minded, when secret prayer is indolently attended to and superficially performed, when family religion is not cultivated, when the solemnities of the house of God are not delighted in, or at least not attended with care, reverence, and godly fear; and in short, when we do not exercise ourselves to keep a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men, we may be said to quench the Spirit. When we despise the gospel as Israel did the manna, when we murmur against providence, entertain either a vain, light, and empty disposition, or a sullen, envious, angry, malicious, revengeful, censorious temper, and when we receive not instruction, reproof, convictions, and admonitions, whether from enemies, from friends, from providence, from scripture, or conscience, I think we may be said to grieve and vex the Spirit.

More particulars might be mentioned, such as self-confidence, self-will, distrust, unbelief, unthankfulness, &c. I would only add a few hints, whereby believers may conclude that they have grieved the Holy Spirit. When we find darkness, dulness, heaviness, coldness, formality, with all their dismal trains prevailing; we shall soon find ourselves backsliding and revolting from God, leaving our first love, and lie sadly exposed to temptations; we may then conclude, that we have

grieved the Spirit, and consequently we must expect to be really grieved, and sorely vexed ourselves; for the Holy Comforter is departed, and we left to the sad buffetings of Satan, to grope in the dark like the blind at noonday; are left to fears and tremblings, to hardness of heart, and what not. Well might the Holy Ghost say, *Woe unto them when I depart from them*, Hos. ix. 12. and they may mourn and say, *Woe unto us that we have sinned, the joy of our heart is ceased, the crown is fallen from our head*, Lam. v. 15, 16. The Lord draw us that we may run, and follow hard after him, keeping near and cleaving to him, with full purpose of heart!

QUEST. XIX.

How shall a person know, and be satisfied he aims principally at the glory of God, in his doing this, or that, or the other thing?

GOD is glorified, though not intentionally or designedly, various ways, by the whole creation, and will be glorified to all eternity. The Most High will have his own glory even in, and upon the ungodly. And divers ways his own people glorify their God, while here in this state of imperfection. But the query respects only our aim to glorify God in doing this or that. I suppose the term *doing* is confined to the actions performed by the members of our body; yet I conceive that the judgment, will, and affections, may be deemed as much the actions of the soul, as any thing else can be of the body, or any member thereof. The soul must aim aright, otherwise it is impossible for any lower or bodily actions to be directed in a due manner. Then in order to glorify our Father, who is in heaven, while we are here on earth, it is necessary that our understanding should be enlightened, our judgment informed, and our affections drawn to God, through the loveliness and suitableness of the Mediator, 2 Cor. iv. 6. under the drawing, endearing, and attracting influence of the blessed Spirit. This being premised, I would consider all our actions as inward or outward.

very little will be done on this side heaven. The hearts that are well furnished for service in the church of Christ, whether it be by writing, preaching, praying, or any other way, let them bewail before God their indwelling sin; yet let them not upon any account hide their talent in the earth, but rather stir up the gift of God bestowed upon them, for edification. How did Bradford the martyr complain of his heart! yet what a holy and honourable man was he!

In divine worship ministers may be said to aim principally at the glory of God, when their intentional and direct designs are to show forth the glory and majesty of his perfections, his goodness, grace, and mercy, through Jesus Christ; how worthy he is to be loved, served, trusted, praised, and adored; and when they endeavour to set forth man's misery out of Christ, to proclaim the glory, fulness, and compassion of Christ, with a view that poor sinners should fall in love with him, and embrace the salvation through him. Ministers aim right when the whole bent of their lives is to promote the salvation of souls, in God's appointed way, and depend upon his blessing, and the gracious influence of his Spirit. Hearers aim at the glory of God, when they attend on God, in the use of means appointed by him, with a longing desire to know him more, that they may serve him better, and when they conscientiously keep their place in the house of God, to pray, hear the word, and partake of his ordinances, in order to bear their testimony for God and his worship against the openly profane, and the careless professor. When we have these things in view, we glorify God in our closet, in our family worship, and in the solemn assembly, and in eating and drinking at his table.

In our common conduct and calling in life, we should aim principally at the glory of God: this we do when we pray to him for direction, when we take his word for our rule, when our conscience is tender of his glory, and when the general bent of our heart is to demean ourselves every day, so that others may, by our holy and inoffensive conversation, be induced to think and speak well of God and his ways; or at least that we give no just occasion for others to blaspheme or to speak evil of the Holy name by which we are called, of the glorious doctrine we profess, or of the good ways we own. Thus the Apostle served God with all humility of mind, and walked inoffensively, suffering much, with this view, that the ministry might not be blamed, behaving holily, justly, and unblameably; so husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, are exhorted to do, that the doctrine of

God our Saviour may be adorned in all things, and God glorified.

Eating and drinking should be with an eye to glorify God. God hath appointed eating and drinking in common, for the continuance of our life and strength, that we may be capable of service, while our span of time here lasteth. When we eat and drink with this view, giving God thanks for it, we do it to his glory. We may eat savoury food like Isaac, but we should consult our health and circumstances, with inoffensive life more than our taste and palate: when we eat and drink to excess in quantity, or beyond what is meet in quality, we sin. It may be further observed, that the eating and drinking in 1 Cor. x. 31. seems to refer to things offered to idols, treated of at large in the chapter.

In every thing we have to do with, we should consider for what end God principally appointed it, and then as far as we pursue the same end, I think we glorify him.

When all is said, and all is done, it must be confessed, that in every thing we put our hand to, we come short of the glory of God. This should keep us very humble at his foot, and dependant on a dear Redeemer, the more endeared by so much the more we see our need of him. Jesus Christ glorified God without the least imperfection. Let us endeavour to glorify him according to our measure of grace, and in our proper station, with all humility, and comfort yourselves with the believing views of that state wherein we shall glorify God for ever, without the least hesitation or imperfection.

It is to be feared there are too many who pretend to glorify God, like those in Isa. lxvi. 5. when their principal aim is, like Diotrophes, to have the glory and pre-eminence themselves. In this very point, a corrupt heart hath deceived many.

QUEST. XX.

How may we distinguish betwixt that which is moral, and that which is typical, or merely ceremonial, in the books of Moses; and, consequently, which of those precepts are still in force; and which are those long since abrogated?

THE people of Israel for a long while did, and still do read the books of Moses with a vail upon their heart. It is to be feared that many who call themselves Christians, are in the same case: and not a few real believers read that part of the word of God with little understanding, and others neglect it, esteeming it, for the most part, as a collection of old rituals, and antiquated ceremonies, of no signification now, because obsolete and out of date long ago. That a considerable part of the books of Moses was abolished at the death of Christ, I firmly believe. My design in proposing the query was, to be informed what part is abolished, and what not; that we might read that, as well as other parts of the word of God, with understanding, delight, and to our spiritual advantage.

The *Mosaic* law is generally divided into three principal branches, viz. the moral, the civil, and the ceremonial law.—The *moral* law directed and enjoined our duty to God and man. It was given to our first parents in their state of innocence, and creation purity. After the fall of man, this law continued still in being, and full authority to the days of Moses. Then God was pleased to give a new, plain, and fair edition of it, written with his own finger, in two tables of stone. This is commonly called, The Ten Commandments. It is concisely collected, yet plainly expressed by our Lord Jesus Christ, in these words: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: this is the first and great commandment,* (this is the first table, containing the first, second, third, and fourth commandments;) *and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;* (this is the second table, and contains the last six commandments.) *On these two commandments hang all the law* (this is the very sum and substance of the moral law,) *and the prophets.* This is the subject matter of all that was com-

manded by all former prophets and preachers, in all their sermons, admonitions, and exhortations. Now this law was never abrogated. Jesus Christ came not to destroy it; but to fulfil, magnify, and make it honourable.

The *civil* law is also termed the *judicial* or *judiciary* law. Here we are to observe, that in Moses' time, the Lord was pleased to take the people of Israel, and single them out as a peculiar people above all people; a body politic, or kingdom: so he condescended to be their king. Hence they were a *theocracy*, or a people governed by God. Now the Lord, as their king and lawgiver, gave them proper laws and statutes, peculiar to themselves, directing how to act, judge, and pass sentence, in all civil debates about property, and to regulate the punishment of offenders in civil matters. This was founded upon the moral law, and yet was given in particular to Israel as a theocracy. Their civil law is just and reasonable, therefore an excellent foundation and directory for the civil law, or law of the land, in every kingdom and government under heaven. Yet I do not think that the judicial law in Israel is now, precisely as such, in force among us, or any other gentiles: but that the kings and governors in every nation, have full power and authority to enact laws and statutes, according to the customs, manners, and circumstances of their own country. Nevertheless, the legislators, in every realm and climate should have particular regard to the moral law, lest that should be transgressed by their civil law: the gospel dispensation should also be well weighed where the gospel is professed. Every-where reason, justice, equity, and circumstances are to be observed in enacting and executing the laws of the land. The judge in Israel had a discretionary power lodged in himself. Upon the whole, we may look upon the judiciary law given to Israel, as partly in force, and partly abrogated.

The *ceremonial* law, which regarded the sacrifices, uncleannesses, purifications, and all the types and shadows before the coming of Christ, therefore called, *The shadow of good things to come*. This was given to our first parents after the fall: it was somewhat enlarged in Abraham's time; but there were so many things added upon mount Sinai, that it was after that time called, *The law of Moses*. Then the tribe of Levi was set apart, and their whole service was, to manage, determine, and execute this law; and it is called, *The Levitical Law*. This was to continue to the death of Christ; and then both the law and the priesthood, with all the levitical service, were

to vanish entirely. See Heb. vii. 11, 12. So the ceremonial law is long ago abrogated wholly. Yet still it ought to be read with care and veneration; for it points unto excellent things that were then to come, even Jesus Christ, and the glorious salvation by him. The whole of it was gospel, but in obscure shadows and dark adumbrations. [Many of the types in this law are profitably explained in the first volume of the *Dialogue betwixt Truth and Friendly*; to which I refer the inquisitive reader.]

Now my query is, *How may we distinguish between these laws, as they are so intermixed and interwoven in the books of Moses? And consequently what of them we are to look upon as binding upon us?* But let this always be remembered,—the whole is to be read, as the sure and good word of God, given to his own people, in former ages, and pointing out great things to us in these last times. I can think of no general and plain rule, whereby common Christians may discern this with ease and edification; therefore I have taken a general survey of the whole, and in some things have been very particular and minute. The result of the whole, I humbly and freely submit to the inspection, scrutiny, censure, and emendations of the candid and judicious. I have taken the books in order, thus:

GENESIS,

FOR the most part, is a sacred and divine history. The most ancient in the world, and yet authentic. It gives a true account of the principal genealogies, the most eminent and illustrious persons, with the most important and striking transactions, for upwards of 2000 years; that is, from the creation of the universe, to the death of Joseph. This book is also interspersed with many precious promises; some regarding the present life, others concerning Jesus Christ, and the great, free, and blessed salvation through him. The sacrifices and offerings mentioned in Genesis, before and after the flood, and likewise the circumcision belonging to the ceremonial law, and therefore ceased: they are, in my opinion, part of the handwriting which was nailed to the cross of Christ.

EXODUS,

FROM the beginning to the end of chapter xi. contains a piece of history so well attested, and so astonishing in every part of it, that the world at that time, were struck with wonder and amazement. The power and glory of God shine in it still.

Ch. xii. gives us a very exact account of the passover, and the rites belonging to it. This is a considerable part of the typical law. Christ celebrated the last passover, that was according to divine institution, in the night in which he was betrayed. Then the history is reassumed, and continued to the end ch. xix. yet in these chapters we have an account of several types and emblems of great things, as separating the first-born unto the Lord; the charge concerning the passover repeated; the song of Moses; the manna; the water out of the rock; with some other particulars. Indeed we have in ch. xviii. v. 13, &c. the first appointment and regulation of judges of divers degrees among that people, their truly noble, great, and disinterested qualifications are set down, v. 21. These were to execute the civil law. In ch. xx. we have the moral law delivered in a most solemn manner, with glory and awful majesty. As it was the introduction, so it seems to be the foundation of all that was afterward delivered from the fiery mountain. All shadows and the substance, the types and the antitype, cast a lustre upon the moral law. The substance of this law will continue for ever, even in heaven.—V. 24. &c. belong to the ceremonial law.

Ch. xxi. begins the collection of their political or civil law. For they were then a kingdom, or body politic, set apart from all other people, and their gracious, but dread Sovereign, was now issuing out wholesome laws peculiar to his new-erected empire. The statutes concerning Hebrew servants bought (v. 1 to the 7th) and daughters sold, v. 7, &c. I believe pertained only to that people, in that country, and under that dispensation. It is certain that the slave trade was in being then. The several laws, beginning v. 12, were merely of the civil kind, founded upon reason and justice; yet in the latter peculiar to that people; nevertheless, in substance, they suit every nation, even at this time: though in these there were some things typical, as the city of refuge, v. 13. and the altar, v. 14. At that time the judges were vested with a discretionary power, v. 22. and so they are still, provided they do not transgress a positive law.

Ch. xxii. is upon the same subject. Some things in it pertained to Israel only, such as v. 20. 25, &c. v. 29, &c. belong to the ceremonial law.

Ch. xxiii. to v. 9. belong to the civil law, and give excellent directions to be every-where now observed. From thence to v. 19, we have parts of the typical law; from v. 20, to the end we have instructions, promises, and encouragements, suited

only to Israel in their then present situation in the wilderness, and about their entrance into the land of Canaan. But still they afford gospel believers many useful instructions.

From the beginning of ch. xxiv. to the end of ch. xxxi. we have a number of types and adumbrations of great and good things to come. All belonging to the levitical law, therefore are vanished away; yet we are to remember that it is the word of God affording many excellent lessons for the man of God, for whom all scripture is chiefly given.

Ch. xxxii. and xxxiii. entertain us with an humbling and striking history of the people's provoking revolt, the judgment upon them, Moses' intercession, &c. all peculiar to Israel at that time; but still to be read carefully, and considered seriously by us under the gospel, for they are written as a warning to others in aftertimes, 1 Cor. x. 1, &c.

Ch. xxxiv. to v. 17, gives instruction, promises, and cautions, to that people under their circumstances at that time. A believer now may look over that with profit and pleasure, finding that it yields doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. From v. 17 to the 26th, we have some branches of the ceremonial law repeated. Concerning seething or boiling the kid in his mother's milk, there are divers opinions: we have the prohibition three times in the books of Moses. What, I think, bids fairest for the truth, is this: that it was a heathen and idolatrous custom: some affirm that the idolatrous nations, at the ingathering of their fruit, took a kid and boiled it in the milk of the dam, and then in a magical way, went about and besprinkled all their fields, gardens, orchards, and trees; thinking, by this means, to make them more fruitful the next year. The Lord would not have his people act so idolatrous, unnatural, cruel, or barbarous. From v. 27. to the end, we have a history, very instructive, and it had something of a type in it. See 2 Cor. iii. 13, &c.

Ch. xxxv. v. 2. belonged to Israel and to us; v. 3. to Israel alone, and perhaps was to continue only while they were in the wilderness, as they had no fuel provided in their then moveable habitations. See Num. xv. 32, &c. From v. 4. to the end of Exodus, we have the particulars about building the tabernacle, with all the appurtenances thereof. The whole typical, directing to spiritual and heavenly things. See Heb. ix. 1, 2, &c.

LEVITICUS,

For the most part, directs the priests and Levites how to

execute their office. It contains the main body of the ceremonial or levitical law. From the beginning to the end of ch. vii. instructions are given regarding the divers kinds of sacrifices. Some few remarks may be here made. The sin mentioned in ch. iv. may be considered as of a moral nature, though perhaps it might be a transgression of the ceremonial law, was a transgression of the moral law. Ch. vi. mentions sins against the political law. When that law was transgressed, then both tables of the moral law were violated. The fat forbidden in ch. vii. 23, was only that which they used in their sacrifices, v. 25. according to the positive command, ch. iii. 9, 10, and other places. Concerning blood, v. 26, 27. I look upon the law as moral and typical, as the precept was given before Moses, and the prohibition renewed by the Apostles, when met altogether, and under the direction of the Holy Ghost, Acts xv. 20, 28, 29.

Ch. viii. relates very minutely how solemnly Aaron and his sons were clothed, anointed, consecrated, and installed into the priestly office: ch. ix. informs how they began to execute their holy and important function. Both chapters concern the ceremonial law: ch. x. transmits unto us how soon the sons of Aaron transgressed the sacred law, just before given unto them; with the immediate and awful judgment of God upon them. It stands to this day, like Lot's wife, as a caution to all, and especially ministers. V. 9, 10, 11. pertained, no doubt, to Aaron and his surviving sons, with all their successors, while that priesthood continued. It should now suggest to every minister of Jesus Christ, how watchful and temperate he ought to be. The latter part of the chapter is typical.

Ch. xi. directs the people of Israel what beasts, birds, and fish they had liberty to eat of, and what not. I look upon the difference betwixt the clean and unclean here to be ceremonial; for to Noah, and his posterity it was said, *Every living thing that moveth, shall be meat for you.* And Peter's vision seems to suggest, that this difference pertained to the Mosaic economy only; denoting the distinction, and was a part of the partition wall between the Jews and the Gentiles, but abrogated when that wall was broken down by the death of Christ. Yet I think that the clean beasts, birds, and fish, by the law of Moses, are still the more proper and wholesome food, though every creature of God is good, if received with thanksgiving.

Ch. xii. xiv, xv, xvi, xvii. are altogether typical, and ceased with the levitical priesthood. Nevertheless, we have in them many humbling and instructive lessons, showing what vile and

unclean persons we are, and how absolutely necessary it is that we should be washed and cleansed in the blood of Christ; nothing else will take out the deep stain.

Many plead that the law in ch. xviii. is ceremonial, and therefore abolished. But to me it appears to be evidently of a moral nature, and as carefully to be observed now, by us gentile believers, as it was then. The introduction, and the conclusion of the chapter, strongly prove it. *None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin*, v. 6. that is, you shall have no intermarriages with any that is near of kin. Then the particular kindred forbidden, are punctually pointed out. When all the particulars are mentioned, with some other abominations, which are without any contradiction, of a moral nature, it is said, *defile not yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you*, v. 24. They are all termed *abominable customs*, v. 30.

Ch. xix. is mixed; v. 3, 4. moral, and still in force; v. 5, 6, 7, 8. ceremonial, and abolished; v. 9, 10. civil, and perhaps partly typical, not literally now in force, yet it teacheth us to take care of the poor, and be ready to communicate. From v. 11 to 18, partly moral and partly political, and now to be observed. The gendering with diverse kinds, in v. 19. I believe is still forbidden; it is confounding creatures, and the order of nature. But I suppose the mixed seed and garment was ceremonial; for the various kinds of grain are given for our food; likewise wool and flax are given for clothing: v. 20, 21, 22. of the ceremonial and civil kind, but does not pertain to us now. V. 23, 24, 25. ceremonial; v. 26. I believe to be moral; v. 27, 28. also moral, being a prohibition not to follow idolatrous nations, denoting immoderate grief for the dead; v. 29, 30, 31, 32. moral, and still in force; v. 33, 34. something peculiar to Israel, but instructive now. The following verses are moral, and to be observed.

Ch. xx. to v. 6. was peculiar to Israel; then for the most part to the end, it instructs what punishments to inflict upon the transgressors of the foregoing laws. The laws mentioned as transgressed, I believe, are branches of the moral law, but the penalty was political. Whether the penalty is still to be inflicted, may be a question. The crimes are now cognizable and punishable by the magistrate, but the legislators should consider the penalty, according to the dispensations we are under, having strict regard to the moral law, reason and justice.

Ch. xxi, xxii, xxiii. belong all to the ceremonial law, and

are abolished. And so ch. xxiv. to v. 9. the affair of the blasphemer is a true and sacred history, and that affair gave occasion to enact the law in v. 15, 16. which was on Israel strictly binding. How far the penalty is now to be inflicted, I will not determine; but every transgressor of this kind is certainly guilty before God, who is ever jealous of his own glory; v. 17, &c. are the political or civil law. It should now be well considered, in acting and executing laws, though probably not literally followed. Ch. xxv. pertains to the levitical law and priesthood, and is ceased.

Ch. xxvi. consists of precepts, prohibitions, promises, threatenings, &c. suited to the Mosaic dispensations; yet full of instruction to us at this time. Though the dispensation is changed, yet morality and divine worship are carefully to be observed, with reverence and godly fear, else temporal and eternal judgments are to be expected. The threatenings, in this chapter have been accomplished on Israel long ago, and they are still under the rod. The promises, v. 44, 45. have been in part fulfilled, on their return from Babylon, and at other times; yet I am confident there will be a further accomplishing of those, and many other promises to the twelve tribes of Israel: v. 46. imports that all the preceding laws were enacted in a peculiar manner between God and the Israelites, and to continue to the coming of Christ.

Ch. xxvii. pertained to the ceremonial law, and is abrogated.

NUMBERS.

CHAP i, ii, iii, iv. antiquated; most of them suiting Israel only while in the wilderness. Ch. v. partly political, and partly ceremonial: the letter of it is now abrogated, but the doctrine to be retained with care. The vow and law of the Nazarite, ch. vi. is not binding on gospel believers; v. 23, &c. was a set form for the priests to bless the people, see Deut. x. 8. and xxi. 5. This form was peculiar to Israel: in ch. vii. we have the free offering of the twelve princes at the dedication of the tabernacle; ch. viii. ceremonial and abrogated; ch. ix. to v. 14. abolished; the rest of the chapter is an instructive history: in ch. x. we have some further rites, pertaining only to Israel, to v. 10. then we have an account of the first march of the people after the tabernacle was erected, and all the regulations on mount Sinai.

Ch. xi, xii, xiii, xiv. contain a very important history, and was written for our example, 1 Cor. x, xi, xii. Ch. xv. cere-

monial, but v. 30, 31. I think belong to the moral law, though in some things suited to that dispensation. So concerning the sabbath-breaker, yet we should pay due regard to the Lord's day; ch. xvi. is a most awful warning piece; ch. xvii. is a kind of an appendix to it, is a true history, and a shadow of good things to come; ch. xviii. and xix. are abrogated; ch. xx. is a short detail of great things, by which we should be admonished, and so ch. xxi. Here we are to observe, that the water out of the rock, and the brazen serpent, were eminent types of Christ.

In ch. xxii, xxiii, and xxiv. we have the famous and interesting account of Balak and Balaam; ch. xxv. presents us with the sad fruits and consequences of Balaam's wicked and ungodly advice; ch. xxvi, xxvii. contain more scripture history, interspersed with some traces of their polity, regarding their settlement in the land of Canaan; ch. xxviii. and xxix. belong all to the ceremonial law, and are mostly a recapitulation of what was before delivered, with some explanation; ch. xxx. is an addition to Lev. xxvii. The other chapters in Numbers are merely historical, yet very instructive; and several passages belong to their civil law, and were also typical, especially the city of refuge.

DEUTERONOMY

Is a view of the forty years journey in the wilderness, from whence solemn exhortations, admonitions, warnings, &c. are given to Israel. Some former laws are repeated, moral, judicial, and ceremonial, which are pretty easily discerned by what I have said already. From the beginning of ch. xix. to the end of ch. xxv. belong almost entirely to their judicial or civil law; and a great part of it peculiar to the people of Israel under that dispensation. I see no necessity to add any more remarks upon this book, as it so corresponds and tallies with what hath been already noted.

QUEST. XXI.

How shall a Person know when a promise, or threatening, is brought by God or by Satan to the soul?

I AM fully persuaded, that Satan, very often, does apply promises and threatenings to saints and sinners; but so artful, that neither the one nor the other is always able to discern it. As satan is a common adversary, we may be sure that he has an evil design in hand, whenever he makes use of the sacred word. Seeing the case is so, when we find the word of God brought to our mind, and fastening on our hearts, we should thus ask, Is this Word brought by the Holy Ghost, or by the evil Spirit? Now the question is, "How shall I know who brought it?" Let us try these particulars.

I. We should consider the end and tendency of the promise or threatening which affects our mind. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply a promise, the soul is more or less led to Jesus Christ; *for all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ*. There is also some direction given to look to Jesus, and strength offered to trust in him. This implies approbation of, and a degree of love to a dear Redeemer: and this love will excite hatred to sin; for faith purifies the heart, and works by love. Then holiness is promoted, the glory of God is in view, and all those precious fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Gal. v. 22, 23, &c. Col. iii. 12, 13. Jam. iii. 17. are more or less experienced and unfeignedly sought for. When a threatening is brought on the mind by the same Blessed Spirit, it has generally, perhaps always, a tendency to excite us to flee to Christ. For instance, this threatening is brought, *Thou shalt die in thy sin*, i. e. unless thou flee to Jesus. Again, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law of God*; but still it is, except they flee to Christ.—To deter from sin, the Spirit hides the Word in the Believer's heart with this view, that he may not sin. *You shall perish*, saith he, *except ye repent: if thou regardest and nourishest iniquity in thy heart, God will not regard thy prayer*.—To diligence in duty. *If any man draw back*, saith the Spirit, *I have no pleasure in him*. The man under the influence of the heavenly Teacher will say, "I would not draw back, on any account; I will endeavour to

push forward, though I am weak and feeble : if he slay me at last, I will wait, trust, and hope, even to death." But,

When Satan brings a promise, he has other designs in hand; he has quite different ends to serve. He will not lead to Christ faithfully; for if he does transform himself into an angel of light, it is to carry on the work of darkness. He may say, *Trust in Christ*; but it is in order to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. If Satan says, *The foundation of God standeth sure*, it is to harden the person's heart that he may not depart from iniquity. He often applies promises to promote sin. We have a glaring instance of this in his combat with the Lord of life and glory, Mat. iv. 6. When he acts so on the green tree, what will he not do on the dry! When we are emboldened by a promise to commit sin, and then excited to cloak it, we may be sure the serpent is at work. When he deals in promises, he is like a filthy sow, tempting and soliciting to brutal uncleanness and sensuality; but when he deals in threatenings and menaces, he resembles a roaring lion, or a fiery dragon. He says, "It is in vain to flee to Christ, it is too late, thou art too vile, Christ will have nothing to do with such a wretch as thou art," or any thing that hinders to Christ, he does not care what, if it but answer the end. He says, "It is in vain to pray," the wily serpent will throw in a crowd of vain thoughts while the believer is praying, and when prayer is over, he will say, "There is a fine prayer! give over for shame; God will not hear sinners; such prayers as these are an abomination to him." When the Holy Spirit reproves for vanity in prayer, he says, "Be more watchful, more humble, more earnest," &c. He will wound the very heart, but it is to heal and strengthen the weak, sickly believer. But the devil is always a murderer: he says, "It is in vain to hear or read; the word is the savour of death unto death." If one goes to the Lord's table, he says, "Thou eatest and drinkest thine own damnation." Thus he terrifies poor souls, and many are so ignorant of his devices, that they believe him.

II. When the Spirit of God applies a promise or threatening, it is to promote something useful, to the glory of God, and the good of his people, to support under affliction, and direct through difficulties, in a holy and an humble way. To Joshua he says, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*. This was to keep up his heart in the hard service before him. That he had the glory of God near at heart appears evidently, for when God seemed to forget his good promise, the holy man's plea was, *What wilt thou do unto thy great name?* Joshua vii. 9.

The same promise is brought to believers long after that, to discountenance covetousness and distrust, but to excite contentment and holy fortitude, Heb. xiii. 5, 6. But Satan brings promises to promote trifles, and excite self-conceit. He brought a promise to persuade Jesus Christ to cast himself down headlong. To what purpose was that? What end could it answer? Those who prayed for things to consume on their lust, very probably pleaded promises. While pope Alexander was treading on the neck of Frederick the emperor, at Venice, Mr. Fox tells us, that he repeated that promise, "Thou shalt tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." There have been sad instances of shameful madness carried on under the pretence of promises. When Jehu was driving on furiously, and wading through blood to the throne, he would again, and again say, *This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant the prophet*; yet all the while he was an idolater, under Satan's influence.

III. The Holy Spirit brings promises and threatenings to encourage the use of proper and appointed means, to obtain free promises, and escape just threatenings. Paul believed that he had a promise from God, and that it should be according to the promise; yet they use precaution to shun rocks: the sailors who were more skilful than the soldiers and passengers, in time of danger must abide in the ship, as the instruments by whom the promise was to be accomplished. The people must take food and be cheerful; they use then all possible means to thrust the ship any way to shore. Hezekiah had a promise that he should recover, that he should go to the house of the Lord on the third day; and lest he should doubt the promise, he had the token on the dial, which he chose himself: but for all this, a plaster must be applied to the boil, by the prophet's direction. Ezra had a general promise, *That the hand of God is upon all them for good that seek him*. Here we have a description of the very persons to whom the promise pertains, so they give themselves to prayer and fasting, Ezra viii. 21, 22. Daniel did read the promise in Jer. xxix. 10. but withal he saw there, that the people should pray, v. 12, 13. so the prophet gives himself to prayer, and pleads fervently in his supplication, see Dan. ix. almost through the chapter. When Satan produces threats or promises, he does it to supersede use of means, and to persuade the persons to despise and lay aside duty. As if Paul had said, *I believe it will be as God hath promised, therefore let the sailors go where they will, we need*

not fear rocks, quicksands, shipwreck, or any thing; we shall go safe to land. As if Ezra and Daniel had said, *God will make good his promise; he regards his own veracity more than our prayers, therefore we may be easy.* Or as if Hezekiah had reasoned thus: *God hath promised, he hath set the time, and given a token also, what signifies troubling myself with a plaster?* Many are deluded with promises, but look upon duty, in order to obtain promises, as a poor, low, mean, legal way; as if true faith must not produce obedience and works. Others are terrified with threatenings to frighten them from duties as above observed. The poor believer seldom thinks that Satan is so apt to show him the imperfections of all performances. O friends, be not discouraged in duty, but still go on, let what will follow.

IV. The good Spirit brings to remembrance promises and threatenings, faithfully and honestly, in a way consistent with the whole scope of scripture, true religion, real godliness, and right reason. But Satan is the father of lies, even when he quotes the true promises of a faithful God. He mutilates, wrests, and tortures the scripture, makes one part to clash with the other. When Satan urges Christ with a promise of protection, he does it like a serpent, leaving out, in the midst of the promise, that word which was against his purpose, *To keep thee in all thy ways*; but our dear Master has taught us that we are not to tempt God in depending on promises, when we go out of the way, Mat. iv. 6, 7. God is not the author of confusion, but Satan always is.

V. When the Lord brings a promise or threatening to the soul, the understanding is enlightened, the judgment is at liberty to reason, weigh, and conclude impartially; nay, is charged so to do in the light of an illuminated understanding, under the eye of conscience, under the direction of God's infallible word, in the presence of the Almighty, and looking forward to the decisive tribunal, where judgment shall soon be set to the line and plummet. So many weighty considerations must undoubtedly strike the soul with awe; yet, where Satan does not disturb, there is an inward serenity, coolness, calmness, satisfaction, and pleasure in all this. The soul loves to be under so many eyes, to be so well guarded, and will say, *Lord, search me; try me, let all be according to thy word, thy will.* When the case is thus with the soul, the affections are drawn to right objects, and the will is submissive, so that there is harmony among the higher and nobler powers of the soul. But when Satan brings the promise, the address is generally

made to the affections, the fancy, the senses, and often very corrupt and headstrong passions; then the understanding is blinded, a mist is raised before the mind, so that it is darkened, conscience must sleep, the word must not appear at all, nor any part of it, but what must serve to carry on the present purpose; so the judgment is in darkness and chained there, and reason is bribed and corrupted. But the will bears all before it, though even that is but a slave to the affection, the fancy, the corrupt appetites, &c. Out of many I will produce one instance: Ahab was determined to go and fight for Ramah, in Gilead. Jehosaphat would have him to inquire at the Lord, whether it was right for him to go, and if the expedition would be successful. Ahab complies immediately, but must consult his own prophets, that he might be sure to have it his own way: they all agree to a man, and promise success to the king; but every one under the influence of the lying spirit. When mention was made of Micaiah, Ahab was afraid he would overturn the whole scheme: but when the king of Judah would have his opinion, the messenger entreats Micaiah to speak good to the king. The lying spirit wanted to corrupt the Lord's prophet like the rest; but when that would not do, Ahab would have his own will, and give no ear to truth. Now in the whole affair, the devil's design was to fill the king of Israel with the imagination of victory, on purpose to deceive him, that he might fail in Ramoth-gilead, 2 Kin. xxii. 21, 22, &c.

VI. In applying promises and threatenings, the Spirit of truth promotes the great and essential parts of religion; such as faith in Christ, a holy life, self-trial, mortification of sin, self-denial, &c. But Satan applied promises and threatenings to carry on with rigidity, and imprudent warmth, some small things of religion, like the people who tithed their mint, rue, and cummin, but neglected the weightier parts.

QUEST. XXII.

As Satan has had such long experience, does he know the thoughts and intents of the heart, or only by the gestures and motions of the body?

IT is the prerogative of God alone to know the thoughts afar off; and discern the very intents of the heart; to look upon them *intuitively*; that is, with the utmost ease, and without the least difficulty or labour at all; they being all open and naked before him. Therefore Jehovah himself proposed this universal challenge: *Who can know the heart?* The answer by the mouth of truth is, *I, the Lord, know, or search the heart; I try the reins.* So, by way of eminency, God is the searcher of the heart. Then we may safely conclude, that Satan does not know the thoughts of man, as God doth.—But still, as Satan is a spirit, he has a more free and frequent intercourse with the human mind than many are aware of. I look upon the mind to be the spring, and thoughts to be the streams issuing from it. Satan cannot exactly see or discern the spring-head, nor perhaps all the streams. A good man may have many thoughts, which Satan cannot be very privy to. I think, that, in the exercise of faith, love, hope, &c. thoughts must be employed, as the mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I am of opinion the evil spirit has no great heart to be very near, so as to pry into particulars, when the good Spirit shines and breathes on the soul, and the Sun of righteousness warms and sanctifies the heart. But even then the enemy is sculking about, and knows that the thoughts are upon things above, and enters where he cannot go. He is about the door, and knows there is a feast within, but cannot understand all the conversation. I imagine that persons in a state of nature may have many deep thoughts concerning natural things, which Satan is not entirely acquainted with: for instance, the inventors and improvers of any art, suppose mathematics, or any other science or mechanic art. Nay, I think there is no person but has some thoughts which Satan is not wholly acquainted with.

Nevertheless I think, that of all creatures, the fallen angels are the most skilful to know our thoughts. Not that I suppose

the devils to be wiser, more intelligent, or of more extensive knowledge, than the angels in heaven. The innumerable company of angels above stand before God, minister unto him, and behold his face always; so their knowledge is more heavenly and sublime: they learn the mind of God; they are sent upon embassies here among men to serve the heirs of salvation, whenever it pleaseth God to send them. But heaven is their chief residence. Now the devil's main exercise is to deceive man, inventing and improving all devices to destroy him. Hence it is that Satan is so artful and busy to know thoughts, which is not so much the concern of holy angels. There is one remarkable advantage, that the enemy has, to know thoughts: he has a way and method undoubtedly to corrupt our mind by injections, and hellish suggestions; which is thus, as far as I can at present conceive of: an idea is presented to the eyes of our body or mind, that is most likely to suit our temper and constitution; then the corruption within us, is excited by him, and irritated; and when he proceeds, which he often does, he may easily know thoughts, that are employed in his service, or set to work by him. He always works in the children of disobedience, and often takes them in his snare at his will, but not always with equal success. It is not as he wills in every respect, but as God is pleased to give permission. In paradise, the serpent began by presenting objects; Eve thought the forbidden fruit exceeding pleasant; Achan was taken by the eye, the goodly garment, the two hundred shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold, stirred up the corruption of his heart. When Satan had leave, how soon did he present Job's oxen and asses to the minds of the Sabeans, and excited their covetousness and fury, so that they fell upon them like madmen, and put the servants to the sword! The Chaldeans invade the camels in the same manner. I will add one instance more: we may conclude that Satan proposed to Judas thus; "If thou dost now go to the chief priests and scribes, they will give thee any money to betray thy Master; now is thy opportunity." Satan must have been some time about that awful affair. In John xiii. 2. it is said, *The devil having put into the heart of Judas to betray him*; that is, injected thoughts into Judas, or proposed temptations which stirred up his covetous disposition. Then, in v. 27. we find Satan entered into him; that is, had greater influence over him, and would let him rest no longer: so he went out, and betrayed his Lord. The case of Ananias and his wife, with many more, are still upon record. But this is rather noting how Satan tempts, than answering

the query. Upon the whole, I conclude, that Satan knows the thoughts and intents of the heart above any creature, except the man himself: and as he is so subtle a spirit, his apprehension so piercing, his scent so quick, (as he has a very near access to our spirits, and by our corruption is admitted to converse very close too often,) perhaps, in the general we have not many thoughts that he is ignorant of. He is more perfectly acquainted with the thoughts of sinners, that are his loyal subjects, than the thoughts of believers in Christ: for he is cast out of the heart of the people of God, and so has lost much of his dominion over them, and intimacy with them.

QUEST. XXIII.

Can a person that is daily harassed with unclean thoughts and desires, be a child of God? If so, what can, what should, a poor unhappy person do, according to the direction of God's holy word, in order to vanquish and overcome the same?

I WOULD answer the former part of the query at once in the affirmative, were it not for the term *desires* in it, which may admit of different constructions. For the most part the word denotes, the full and earnest wish of the mind, to that degree that nothing is wanted to fulfil the *desire* but liberty, opportunity, &c. Then the desire is enlarged as hell, and cannot be satisfied; this is a mischievous desire, an inordinate affection, an evil concupiscence. If the word is taken in this sense in the query, it is really mental adultery, it is transgressing the law, and defiling the man. I believe such a desire as this is intended in Mat. v. 28. I can hardly conceive that a child of God can be in this manner daily polluted. Therefore I suppose that the word *desire*, in the query, designs only lustful irritations, stimulations, or inclinations. Taking this to be the case, I would observe a few particulars. There is in most persons a natural inclination to generation: these desires are absolutely necessary for the continuance and increase of

mankind. God has appointed that his purposes should in this manner be accomplished, and his glory promoted. Nevertheless, these desires are not to be enlarged as hell, but to be restrained and limited by the holy law of God. Things in themselves useful and necessary, according to the law of creation and conservation, are much perverted by our sad depravity. If we have no appetites, that is, no desire and inclination to eat and drink, we cannot be useful in our place, nor live long; yet the glutton, the drunkard, and the voluptuous, greatly abuse the good creatures of God, to the shame, ruin, and destruction of soul and body. So in the case under consideration, when our desires are unlimited, unseasonable, and to excess, they become sinful.—Again, as Satan is an unclean spirit, his element is to promote all manner of uncleanness; therefore we need not doubt but he has a hand to carry on, tempt, and provoke to the uncleanness in the query; so that it is possible that a child of God may be daily and grievously harassed with unclean thoughts for a time. In attempting to answer the second part of the query, I shall have occasion to expatiate a little upon this head, then I shall proceed to observe,

What a poor unhappy person should do, according to the direction of God's holy word, in order to vanquish and overcome unclean thoughts and desires, which do often harass him. ———The will of God is the sanctification of his people; that every one may know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; but many are at a loss to know how to do this, the subject is as seldom handled in this case as any other whatsoever. Distressed ones are also at a loss how, or where to apply for direction, therefore I shall here propose a few, with the freedom of a friend.

I. Consider that the seventh commandment is holy, just, and good; the law of a holy God, and written in the heart of a holy person. Observe that Mat.v.28. is a plain and an infallible explanation of this commandment.—Beware of idleness.—Be careful and industrious in some necessary calling and useful exercise.—In eating and drinking, be prudently and conscientiously sparing. Observe what is necessary to support nature, so as to preserve thy health, and follow thy calling comfortably. Learn to distinguish betwixt that which is necessary food, and that which serves not only to inflame lust, but to injure thy body and oppress thy mind. The heart is overcharged with eating and drinking sooner and oftener than many choose to see. We are strictly charged by our kind teacher, to take heed lest at any time it should be so. Sodom

was proud, had fulness of bread, but abundance of idleness; so they committed abomination with a high hand; therefore God made them an awful example to those who after should live ungodly. When Israel had bread to the full, they were as fed horses, and committed abominable lewdness. Joseph followed his business, as knowing that to be the way to keep under his body. A careful and discreet watch over the eyes, ears, and tongue, is absolutely necessary to some, perhaps to most. We may easily conclude, from scripture account, that Job was a person of strict chastity, yet he found it needful to make a covenant with his eyes. By the eye, David, and many more, were ensnared. Whoever would have the victory over unclean or impure thoughts, let him turn away the eyes of his body from any object that he finds to have the least tendency to excite heart-impurity; even obscene pictures, or any thing of that kind are best avoided. There are too many books, plays, and romances, that seem to be calculated on purpose to corrupt mankind. Some authors have an unhappy talent to dress vice and filthiness in the flowers of rhetoric, and a charming style. A very pious and holy man expresses himself thus upon this head: "I am really afraid to read Spenser's *Fairy Queen*: he is in fancy superior, perhaps, to every poet; yet so luscious in some of his representations, which I have casually dipped upon, that it is impossible, for me at least, to advert to them without catching the contagion. His pictures of this sort are drawn with a good design. He makes his heroes victors of the soft allurements; but, I believe, few minds are so case-hardened against sensual pleasures, as not to receive disadvantageous impressions. I am therefore determined not to look on it again, never to gather the honey of poetry from the briars of contamination. *Flee temptation*, is the advice of an inspired Apostle, and I will pay due regard to it." Nay, there should not be a fondness for reading any thing upon the subject, even in religious books, though handled with modesty, and tending to discourage vice, yet we should carefully observe what effect that has upon us. We are to watch no less careful over the eye of the mind, for that may infect the thoughts, either by reflection or imagination. Sin is multiplied by *calling to remembrance*. Eyes of body or mind, that are full of adultery, cannot cease from sinning. The ears likewise are to be stopped from the filthy conversation of the wicked. Unclean thoughts may arise from the hearing of the ear. The tongue, by all means, should not be defiled with filthiness and foolish talking, or any corrupt communi-

cation. He that does not bridle his tongue, in this case, does but trifle when he complains of his thoughts. When conversing with a serious man, and in a serious way, of the corroding wickedness and lamentable debauchery of the age, mentioned what was reported of particular persons in our own neighbourhood, which was the occasion of our discourse, though we detested the conduct, and bewailed the misery of vile wretches; yet for all this I found some of the filth sticking to my mind, perhaps for two or three days after. How cautious ought we to be!

II. Care should be taken to distinguish betwixt our own sin and Satan's temptations. We may be sure that the enemy is full of wiles in this affair, both with the godly and the ungodly, in thoughts and actions. But the query regards only the thoughts of the godly. The sacred history informs us, that pious husbands and wives are in danger of being tempted by Satan, for their incontinencies. Satan knows very well the constitution, disposition, or inclination of the person, as noted in the foregoing queries. He observes and improves times, seasons, and advantages. He knows what sin will most easily beset us; he hath numerous ways to disturb our mind. Our eyes, ears, and tongues, are often made instruments of much hurt in his service. By the cast of an eye, he may at once be able to pour in a crowd of injections, which are neither quickly nor easily cast out. It is possible that a person may be tempted, and yet not defiled, nor contract any guilt; but every Christian cannot be a proper judge in this point. Our Lord Jesus Christ was tempted *in all points, like as we are*. Amazing indeed, yet he was in no point defiled! He was like a glass of pure water,—let it be stirred ever so much, it is clear still. True, no mere man is so free from sin: when we are tempted, we are apt to be defiled. Yet a good man may imagine that his sin is much more heinous than really it is. Satan hath a subtle way of raising ideas in the mind, which may distress us grievously, and we may at that very instant loathe and detest the thoughts, yet we cannot be free from them. Now the devil may grieve us sadly, by persuading us that these are all our sins, when in truth they are his fiery darts, which dog and egg us continually, when we would with our very souls be intent upon quite different objects; yet still we are hit in the teeth with these. We can have no rest or peace for these unwelcome guests: these fiends will be haunting us. This we may confidently believe is from Satan; yet the wicked one will tell us, see what a nest of serpents thy heart is! a child

of God was never in thy case, &c. We should indeed be sorry to think and find that Satan has so much room to work upon us, yet we have no business to take his temptations as our own sins. But if we entertain his temptations, we sin immediately. He is like an enemy without the city, throwing in fire as fast as he can; but we should be like prudent and valiant citizens, endeavouring to extinguish it with all our skill. We may still be at a great loss how to distinguish exactly betwixt Satan's temptations and our own heart's corruption. It is not very material, let us endeavour to know when we are defiled; when we delight to turn in our thoughts that which is not convenient, then we sin and contract guilt, and that gives our enemy the advantage.

III. It is a good way to despise these injections, and pay no regard to them: they are the seed which the enemy soweth; and, if they find no depth of earth, they will wither away. It is possible to grieve where we should not; but always let us beware lest we be lulled to sleep on Delilah's lap.

IV. We should hope, and even be confident that we should obtain yet a greater victory, than sometimes we imagine. Though the holiest man on earth is not quite free from all temptation, nor from some corruption, yet in the case under consideration, one remarkable instance occurs to my mind, viz. a person so given to impurity, that he fancied himself invincibly impelled to it by his very constitution, that he thought nothing but shooting through the head could have cured him; nay, he supposed that omnipotency itself could not reform him without destroying his very body, and giving him another. This was before the great change wrought in him by the grace of God. His conversation was uncommonly remarkable; and he was so effectually cured of his impurity, which he thought incurable, that after many years he said, that all desires and inclinations were as entirely removed as if he had been a sucking child. This, to be sure, was a remarkable instance. The wonderful change in him was about the age of thirty-one. His freedom was from sinful thoughts and actions, not otherwise, for he was married about seven years after his conversion, and had many children. He was a most tender and affectionate husband, and a shining ornament to religion, his holiness and chastity exemplary. He left the imperfect state of this life in 1745. This case, though not common, should encourage distressed ones to wait for deliverance. Then when Satan acts the filthy sow, turning up stinking kennels, let us despise his low, mean, abominable course, and dispute not with him; but

say, O Lucifer, art thou fallen from the height of light and glory, to this exercise! Get thee hence, Satan, I will yet look up.

V. Abstain from that familiarity with the different sex, which may be justly deemed needless and too free; especially when it is found to give occasion to unholy thoughts. Chambering and wantonness is making provision for the flesh.

VI. With all, and through all other means, it is absolutely necessary that we should look to faith and prayer. The mind ought to be employed about things above, looking unto Jesus, who suffered so much for vile wretches; by whose blood alone we must be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Faith in his blood, is the only way to quench the fiery darts. We should be fervent in prayer, that the Holy Spirit may condescend to bring often and efficaciously to our remembrance the things of Jesus, so that we may be sanctified wholly in soul, body, and spirit.—The query does only regard thoughts and desires, and the persons concerned in it are conscientious to keep far from unclean actions. Those who delight in impure thoughts, and hate not unchaste actions, have not the seventh commandment written in their hearts: they have not crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts; therefore they would do well to consider Gal. v. 19—24. The query may concern some that are unmarried; let them seriously observe 1 Cor. vii. 2. 7. 9. 39. It seems the Apostle was not married himself: he had such supports from all-sufficient grace, that he wished others like himself. Some in the conjugal relation may be concerned in the query likewise. I myself am in that honourable relation; I have known the conflicts of both states; yet hitherto I am upheld; bless the Lord, O my soul!

I will conclude with a short quotation out of a letter, written by a celebrated author, who, while here, made it his business to glorify God in his conversation, in his ministry, and with his pen; who entered into that state where holiness is in full perfection, and purity untainted for ever, in 1758. To his friend he writes thus: “Recommend *Jenks’s Victory of Chastity* to Mr.—, and tell him, that though the lusts of the flesh are inveterate enemies, yet three methods may be prescribed for a victory over them. 1. A believing application of the Redeemer’s death. The saints in glory, once men of like passions with ourselves, overcame through the blood of the Lamb, he bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we

being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness. 2. An habitual reliance on the Spirit of God. *If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* Christ by his Spirit acts on our depraved, polluted hearts, as a refiner's fire, and as a fuller's soap. 3. An improvement of the divine promises. God has given unto us great and precious promises, that by these we might be made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." In another place, the same author notes, that St. Augustine justly observes, "That of all the conflicts of the Christian, those concerning chastity are the sharpest, because the combat is strenuous and lasting, a complete victory being rarely obtained."

QUEST. XXIV.

How may a Christian know when he eats and drinks by faith the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ sacramentally? or, What it is to be a worthy communicant at the Lord's table?

WE can seldom, probably never, in our time, see a company sitting down at the Lord's table, but they consist of two different sorts, viz. *believers and unbelievers*.—By unbelievers I understand, every one that is not regenerated, or born again; that is not quickened and enlightened savingly by the spirit of God; that is not a new creature; and that has not a spiritual taste, appetite, and relish for true religion; whose conversation is not as becometh the gospel. Of these many are openly profane. It is a pity such should be suffered to come to the Lord's table. It looks like casting holy things to dogs, and pearls before swine. Others are self-righteous persons and hypocrites. It is not so easy to know these, therefore they are false brethren that will come to the assemblies of saints, even when they are separated from the world; these tares will be among the wheat, and the foolish virgins will intermix with the wise: but when the great Shepherd comes, he will entirely and infallibly separate the sheep from the goats. Then and there it will be in vain to plead, *Lord, we have eaten at thy table, &c.* Many that eat

at this table, lift up their heels against him here, yet at last they shall go to their own place.—Unbelievers then of every rank and complexion, are in reality unworthy communicants. They never can eat and drink in the exercise of true faith, which they have not.

Again, believers themselves may eat unworthily, as the Corinthians are supposed to be; yet weakly and sickly, because of their unworthy eating: and as they judged not themselves as they ought to have done, they were chastened of the Lord, that they should not be condemned by the world.—The present query seems to suppose that a true Christian may at some seasons be an unworthy communicant, not eating and drinking in faith; but that the very same person may, at other times, be a worthy receiver, as he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup in faith. I am of opinion, that the case may be so undoubtedly. Now then the question is,

How may a Christian know when he is a worthy communicant, and when not?

There are many cases where it may be very difficult for a person to determine to his own satisfaction, as there is in every believer some true faith, be it ever so feeble; and also, at times, much unbelief. Consequently, there is in every believer some scripture worthiness, and much unworthiness. A real Christian eating and drinking every way unworthily, must be in a sad and deplorable case indeed. I hope there are none of the children of God in our country who come up to the case of the Corinthians. However it is possible, perhaps, for a Christian to be so far declined in spirituals, as to come to the Lord's table, though he lives in a known and heinous sin; is carnal and earthly-minded, the savour of religion is done away by sensuality and worldly conformity, yet comes to the sacred ordinance in a mere customary way, and perhaps to cloak his iniquity, that others may not suspect that he is so lifeless as he knows himself, in some sense to be; he is waxed gross and almost impenetrable; he is not duly affected with his woful case; he thinks but about it beforehand, or while he sits senseless at the table, or after he gets away. If this should be the case, I think that surely such person must eat and drink very unworthily. But it may be queried,

What may such a poor creature do, in such a deplorable case as this?

What ! Let him examine himself, and see whether he rightly discerns the Lord's body or no.—Let him consider from whence he has fallen, repent, and do the first works.—Let him be watchful, and strengthen the very small things which remain, but are ready to die; for his work is very imperfect before God.

QUEST. *Is it best for a person, in such a dead and benumbed state, to partake or no?*

ANS. If he chooses and resolves to continue in that shameful and lamentable state, let him not come to the Lord's table, but refrain his defiled hands from the sacred elements. Yet I would hope that a child of God would not deliberately choose such a dead and uncomfortable frame: but if a person be grievously distressed on the account of a state of soul so very disagreeable, and is at a loss to know what to do; which is best, to communicate or refrain: I humbly conceive that it is the duty of that distressed and burdened soul to wait in the way, and come to remember afresh the love, sufferings, and death of a compassionate Saviour, who died and suffered so much in order to relieve and save poor souls: it may be the Lord will have pity on him, and that before he is aware his soul shall be set at liberty; he may not wait long before he cries out, *I found him whom my soul loved and longed for.*

QUEST. *It is the duty of a believer to refrain once or twice from the Lord's table, on account of the commission of some particular sin, or fall by a temptation which is known only to himself; yet his soul oppressed with guilt?*

ANS. I would determine nothing in such an affair. A person should act prudently. Satan may get an advantage, when one is swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.—If I be wounded at heart because of sin committed, yet if it be not known to others, it is my opinion, I may, with great humility and self-abasement, come to the Lord's table. *Ye have done this wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.* Yet if I choose, by way of self-aborrence and humiliation, to refrain once or twice from communion, perhaps it may not be amiss. *If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in.*—If my fall or sin be known to some person

or persons, and so my case may, possibly, be made more public; I think it then prudent to refrain, and wait the issue, deploring my circumstances before God, and praying that his good ways may not be reproached on my account. For if my fall should come to light, whatever the frame of my heart, with regard to repentance, has been, it will be deemed still an aggravation to my crime, that after the commission of it, I should presume to communicate. That will look to others as if I were hardened in sin, though my compunction for sin had been ever so deeply and sensibly felt.

QUEST. What if a person has been guilty, and his fellow-communicants know of it, and perceive in him evident signs of repentance; yet are offended if he does not suspend his communion for some time, by way of reproof?

Ans. It appears to me to be his duty then, for the honour of the gospel, and to avoid further offence, to refrain, and comply with the desire of his friends, thereby testifying his humility. Yet his brethren should not be too severe, but consider themselves, lest they also be tempted.—If these queries be reckoned digression, I hope the candid reader will pardon it, and permit me now to return.

A person may be sure that he eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ by faith, when his soul within him is greatly humbled for sin before God; and he at the same time, looks upon Christ as crucified for his sin, and bruised for his iniquity: behold Jesus exceeding glorious, even in dyed apparel, though stained with his own blood; yet as he is pierced with the believer's own personal transgressions, the humble receiver loves him with intense love for the glory of his person, his inconceivable love, every way free, bestowed and fixed upon a wretch so vile, to deliver him from endless flames, where he deserved to have had his everlasting abode: and as if deliverance from hell were a small thing, the love of Christ goes much further, and gives an indubitable right to, and fitness for eternal glory, and all the enjoyment and employment of heaven. Where this is, in reality, the case, the highly favoured, and very grateful communicant must needs delight to approach the Lord's table, to remember the unchangeable and inconceivable love, and dying agonies of a dear, dear Redeemer; to behold afresh the precious, precious blood, and to read again his title to the glorious inheritance. The sacred solemnity will be to him a feast of fat things and wine well refined; as

his Lord sits at the table addressing him in such heart-engaging, heart-melting language as this, "Eat, friend;—drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved: I assume this body for thy sake; it was broken for thy sins, and this blood was shed to wash away all thy filth: thou shalt soon be with me, where I am, beholding, and delighting thyself in my glory." To that soul Christ will be all in all: his meditation, incarnation, obedience, sufferings, death, resurrection, intercession, relation to him, &c. will be bread indeed, and the best wine, that goeth down sweetly, which will cause his very soul to long for the new wine in the kingdom of heaven: this wine will strengthen and refresh him so, that it will be his meat and drink to do the will of God, and yield obedience to a beloved Saviour, whose very reproach is far preferable to all the gaudy grandeur of this world: he would be glad to have always *holiness to the Lord* engraven on all his conduct. This person will be sure to examine himself, and discern carefully the Lord's body. He comes to the house of God, not that he may rest in any outward ordinance, though of divine institution; but that, while he is waiting in the appointed way, he may, by faith, have a clearer view of, and more endearing communion with Him, whom his soul loves; with whom he hopes to be for ever, and in whose presence is fulness and perfection of joy.

Probably there are many humble souls, in Christian societies, who find themselves come very short of what is above noted, and is so ready to cry out, *What shall we do?* I am fully persuaded, there are worthy receivers, not a few, whose experience does not reach to the light, comfort, and enjoyment, above observed.—Then I would proceed and attempt to show when a poor, weak, doubting person may conclude himself to be a worthy communicant. Notice has been taken already, that a true christian may be in a sad and wretched declining state, very dead, helpless, and earthly-minded. When a person is in this lamentable case, sensible of it, and groaning under it, he may be a worthy communicant, though dejectedly cast down, and burdened with a sense of his unworthiness. To what has been observed, I would add a hint or two. Let me ask such a soul, what his design is in coming to the sacrament. If he answers, "I long for more spiritual life and light: I know Jesus alone can relieve me, and supply my manifold wants; I would come still like the poor woman, to beg and wait for a few crumbs from his rich table; I depend upon him only for grace here, and glory hereafter: therefore I would be obedient."—This person should remember, for his encourage-

ment and comfort, what the compassionate Redeemer said to that good woman, who reckoned herself with the dogs, that she might happily have some crumbs.—*O woman, great is thy faith!* So he should conclude, that he eats and drinks in faith, but prays for more faith.

Some may be under fiery temptations, or grievously distressed with doubts, fears, and unbelief; and therefore afraid to come to the holy communion. If these are desirous to be relieved by Jesus Christ, the great friend of distressed publicans and sinners, and are determined according to their little strength, to be his disciples and wait the issue in his way,—they are welcome to the feast; let no sinful plea and excuse hinder them: let them start no objections against themselves, but come. With all their fear, they may be very worthy receivers.

For the clearing up of this point, I would beg the reader's patience a little more. Persons may imagine they have no love to Christ, because they have so many fears, doubts, &c. but they should consider, *that perfect love doth cast out slavish fear*: yet where fear doth sadly torment and distress, there may be, and often is, true and real love, though not perfect. If my love be not perfect, it would be weak in me to conclude that I have no love at all. That would be as though I would argue, because I am not so tall or strong as such a person, therefore I am no man at all. This would be a very unjust, untrue, and unfair way of reasoning; yet many of the people of God are tempted to conclude in this weak way, to their own discouragement. Fear that my love is not true, and a desire to have it increase, is an evidence of some love. Where unbelief prevails, and doubts are numerous, many fear there can be no faith. This also is Satan's false reasoning. The strongest believer is often distressed with unbelief. But it is a certain truth, that there is often some true faith where much unbelief remains. Others fear, because they have such a sense of their unworthiness, therefore they conclude they cannot be worthy communicants. These should consider, that no man living is worthy of himself. True worthiness consists in a conviction of sin, to be in pain for it, to long after deliverance from it, to look unto Christ alone for this deliverance, &c. Many have this worthiness, and yet be afraid; because they enjoy not evident communion with God, are not feasted with divine love, have not their heart as free from sin as they could wish: these things, and many more, are very desirable; but we should wait for them in the use of means, and not expect them while we neglect means. If a weak person says, I will

not eat, because I am not strong; another would soon advise him to eat, that he may be strong.

If, after all, any object thus: "I have often come to the communion, under many discouragements, yet still hoping to meet with more comfort; but my fears rather increase, and I almost tempted to give over: a word of advice would be acceptable."

Ans. You are tempted to desist from the use of appointed means, and to disobey the plain command of a dying friend, *Do this in remembrance of me*. But are you not tempted likewise to neglect the very necessary and profitable duty of searching and trying your ways, and return unto the Lord?—To discover the accursed thing that nourishes your corruption, but deadens you in religion?—To neglect fervent prayer before God, with self-abasement?—To love the world, with the pernicious pleasures thereof, more than Jesus Christ, and endearing fellowship with him?—To be unconcerned about the glory of God, with many other things unbecoming a disciple of Christ? Pray for strength against these temptations, then expect that the temptations to forsake the Lord's table may cease. But some conscientious, humble, and pious souls, may be concerned in the objection. To such I would say: continue on: wait until the Lord has mercy upon you, Ps. cxxiii. 2. until you meet with comfort. Remember, endeavour to believe, and look for the blessing promised to those that wait, Prov. viii. 34. A daughter of Abraham was bound by Satan eighteen years; but was loosed on the Sabbath-day. Abraham himself waited for a son five and twenty years after the promise was made; but having waited through faith and patience, even hoping against hope, he at last inherited the promise to his great joy, Heb. vi. 11, &c. Rom. iv. 18, &c. The poor man at the pool waited, labouring under his infirmity thirty-eight years, yet at last he obtained health and comfort.

QUEST. XXV.

What is the true idea, or the most general and direct intention of the term GRACE in scripture?

THE term is used in divers languages, with very little alteration: but in common conversation, and among writers, it is taken and understood divers ways. The query regards only the scripture use of it. We do not find it often in that part called *The Old Testament*; yet in these few places it is easy to discern that the word has not always the same meaning: for instance, in Prov. i. 9. and iii. 22. and iv. 9. grace denotes comeliness and ornament. So James i. 11.—In Prov. xxii. 11. it signifies acceptable and affecting words. Near akin to this is Luke iv. 22. Ps. xlv. 2. Eph. iv. 29. Col. iv. 6.—In Esth. ii. 7. it denotes favour, or good-will and pleasure. So the word *favour* is used very often in scripture. To find favour and to find grace, are synonymous phrases.

In answering the query, we are not required to observe every acceptation of the word in scripture, but only the *true idea*, that is, the most general and direct intention of it. By the *Grace* of God, I think, is meant, in the strict and primary sense, “The infinite goodness, the eternal and unchangeable pleasure, or good-will of God, bountifully, transcendently, and most freely flowing forth to his rational creatures.” In the first, and strictest meaning of the word *Grace*, I do not apprehend it regards either vileness or worth. All the glory and felicity of the angels in heaven is of pure grace or rich bounty, freely bestowed, and ever flowing. All that was bestowed on man in his primitive purity and creation happiness was entirely grace. God was under no manner of obligation then to place man in any nobler station than the meanest worm. At that time he was the clay in the hand of the potter. But most commonly in scripture, by *grace* we are to understand, “the good-will of God to his chosen people, regarding their safety here, and eternal glory hereafter.” Being now come to the most direct intention of the term, I would note, that it is a most charming and comprehensive word, implying the free, eternal, and undeserved love of God, and the rich fruit and effect of it to the elect, fixed, bestowed, and settled with inconceivable pleasure, satisfaction, and delight, so that all his

great and gracious designs shall be accomplished. See Matt. xi. 26. Eph. i. 5. concerning all the goodness of God to his people, whether in intention or in execution, it may be safely said, *He rejoices over them with joy; he rests in his love; he joys over them with singing*, Zep. iii. 17. With great delight, and of grace, the first plan of their salvation was laid; or rather, the wonderful plan of their salvation was the eternal delight of Jehovah. The soul of the Father delighted in Christ redeeming his people: even when the soul of the dear Redeemer was put to grief, justice was inexpressibly pleased. Notwithstanding the weight of the burden, the greatness of the work, with the sorrow, shame, and contempt attending it, yet our dear Lord delighted to do the will of God, to save his people: he despised all the shame for the joy set before him. His delights of old were with the sons of men, and he would love them to the end, and save them to the uttermost.

I must not forget to observe, that all the good gifts of God, pertaining to the salvation of his people, are generally called *grace* in scripture; and that very justly, because freely bestowed, with joy and delight. Thus Jesus Christ is the Father's unspeakable gift; and through Christ, God is pleased to adopt his people, or make them his children, to justify them, to regenerate them by his Spirit, and to sanctify them; so at last he will glorify them: all this freely therefore of rich grace. All the goodness of God to his chosen, from everlasting and to all eternity, is *grace*, because done *gratis*, and with pleasure.

Among divines, faith, hope, love, repentance, patience, &c. are called *graces*. I do not remember that they are so called in scripture; but as they are the effect and fruit of the gracious operations and influence of the Spirit on the mind, they may be termed *graces*, but rather improperly or figuratively. They may, as they grace or adorn the mind and conduct, be reckoned *graces*.

While I was musing on this sweet word, *grace*, a thought, entirely new to me, occurred, which has in it something very entertaining; but here I must confess, the learned have some advantages above the plain Englishman. I will beg leave to give the hint, but leave others to enlarge upon the theme. The Greek word for grace is *charis*, derived from *chara*, which in English signifies joy, gladness, or joyfulness. The word *charis* also in scripture signifies thanks, or gratitude, and very often the word *euchristia* is so taken. With regard to thanksgiving or gratitude, the Latin is remarkably emphatical, *actio gratias*, or *gratiarum*, and in English denotes joyful thanks-

giving to God for grace received ; or, in other words, acting or returning the graces to God again, giving to God his own with usury. Here indeed all the motions of the mind towards God, under different circumstances, named faith, hope, love, &c. may be called graces. There is to me something exceeding pleasant and delightful in this subject. I would express myself as plain as I can. Grace is God's goodness and love, flowing freely, and with infinite delight to his people. Grace, as personally bestowed on the objects of divine love one by one, as in their lost state under sin, is a bringing home to them some of the great things prepared for them. The Holy Spirit first gives them spiritual life, and then capacity to conceive of and relish these good things ; then they hunger after them, and are solicitous lest they should come short of them. After that beginning, which is no other than *regeneration*, then every support, supply, and encouragement afforded to the believer is grace, bestowed freely by the Spirit of grace : this is *sanctification*. Glory hereafter bestowed on the saints will be grace in its full bloom and perfection. Moreover, the praises which saints here give to God for his unspeakable gifts, is grace in small rivulets returning to the ocean from whence they flowed : but the high-sounding praises of the triumphant church above, is, and will be, grace returning in broad rivers and swimming streams for ever. There will be a constant influx and reflux, There will be *actio gratiarum*, a returning of graces, in complete and delightful perfection. For as God bestows his bounties, through Christ, with the greatest delight and joy as God ; so believers here, according to their measure, capacity, and experience, return thanks for bounties in hand and hope, in possession and in reversion, with inexpressible joy, frankness, satisfaction, and delight : but in heaven the pleasure and joy will exceed every thing of the kind here, as the heavens are higher than the earth, and as an elegant feast will exceed a scanty taste, or an imperfect report. There grace will run in a perpetual circulation. Delightful, transporting thought !

Finally, charity is derived from *charis*, grace, and denotes a generous, benevolent mind, true nobility, and real greatness, evidenced by readiness to relieve the needy freely and with delight. So liberality, in 1 Cor. xvi. 3. is grace according to the original : and grace, in 2 Cor. viii. 6, 7. signifies the liberal contributions of the churches to supply the wants of the needy. In 2 Cor. ix. 5, 6. we have the very spirit of a truly charitable

man: he bestows cheerfully, readily, and bountifully. This still is the very nature of grace.

Now I would just observe, That the salvation of God's people, from first to last, is of mere bounty, good pleasure, and rich grace;—that this grace bestowed upon poor, naked, defiled, and deformed sinners, will render them exceeding rich, lovely, amiable, and graceful;—that having received this grace, they will be active for God, move towards him as their centre, and give him all the glory of their salvation, shouting, grace! grace unto it!—*that all this grace is through Jesus Christ*;—that every partaker of this grace loves Jesus Christ, and is sorry he cannot love him more.—that by grace Jehovah is pleased to give himself to his people; and having received this grace, the children of God give themselves to their Father.

QUEST. XXVI.

What is faith? How does it differ from hope, love, repentance, &c.

THIS query is twofold. The former part requires a definition of faith. Perhaps most readers think the answer to this so easy, that it is needless to spend time about it: however I do not think so, but I am sure the subject is very important. Happy those who are acquainted most with it, and are able to give a good account of it! I find a good and infallible definition of faith given thus, in Heb. xi. 1. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* This is a solid answer to the former part of the query. Here we may infer, that faith deals with, and regards things absent and at a distance, which we cannot now fully enjoy, nor see with the eyes of our bodies, nor yet but imperfectly with the eyes of our minds. Faith then is a persuasion of, and concerning absent things upon proper information and evidence; or thus, the faith by which the believer lives and is saved, is an effectual persuasion of absent things, upon a divine testimony. For instance, faith is an affecting persuasion that there is a glorious,

yet compassionate God, though never seen by an eye of flesh ; —that he spake the word only, and the whole creation was formed ;—that the scripture is a true account of the most important things, given by God himself ;—that man for sin is under the curse ;—and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the alone Redecmer from the curse, and the way to eternal glory. Faith is a persuasion that it shall be as God hath promised, and that Jehovah is the fountain and centre of all felicity, bliss, and joy. To live by faith, is to live upon the promises of a faithful God, being persuaded that he will take care of us, manage in the best manner for us here, and glorify us hereafter. Again, to live by faith, is to be persuaded that Jesus is the Lord our righteousness, and so depend upon him wholly for salvation, living upon him, as the glorious mark aimed at in our whole conversation. Much more might be added, but I hasten to

The second part of the query, which is, *How does faith differ from hope, love, repentance, &c.*

Faith is the persuasion, that what is revealed in scripture is true, and that things mentioned and promised therein have a real existence. Hence it is the substance or foundation of things hoped for, and the evidence, or certainty of things not seen.—*Love* is a delight, satisfaction, rest, and pleasure in the things revealed, promised, and believed.—*Hope* is a craving, wishful desire of the things revealed, promised, believed, and loved.—*Patience* is a submissive, quiet waiting for God's time to bestow what he has graciously promised, what the heart believes, and the soul loves.—*Repentance* is the change wrought in the mind, affections, and conduct, by the revelation of gospel truths, and the belief of them.

QUEST. XXVII.

May hope, love, repentance, patience, &c. evidence that a person is regenerated, and in the way to glory, if he should be in doubt about the truth of his faith?

YES. For I cannot love that which I do not believe; nor hope for what I am not persuaded of. But this point should be handled with some care. We have glorious truths revealed in the gospel. One man hears them, and in a traditionary way believes them; but is no way affected with them, nor much concerned about them; therefore regards them not. This man's faith is dead; or more plain, he is a stranger to the faith that accompanies salvation. Another hears the same truths; feels in himself a strong persuasion of the reality and importance of them; he greatly loves the things revealed, upon the evidence he feels in himself of the truth of the report, though he sees them not. Thus he loves Jesus Christ, and eternal glory; nay, he loves the law, the gospel; the worship of God, his ordinances, people, house, and ways. Now every one that loves these, believes the truth of them. So my love to these things will at once evidence my faith, regeneration, &c. Again, if I hope for eternal life through Christ, I must believe that there is eternal life, and that it is obtained through Christ. I observed above, that repentance is wrought in the mind, affections, and conduct, by the revelation, report, and belief of gospel truths. Divine revelation comes with power and authority, and works upon the mind; or rather the Holy Spirit enlightens and affects the mind by, and according to the word. Upon this new and affecting light, this new and strong evidence, there is an inward change. Salvation is now a weighty point, which before was little minded. Jesus is now the chief among ten thousand, though before there appeared in him no desirable comeliness. When this living light is experienced, the bible is the chief book, though so much neglected and slighted in time past. Heaven is earnestly longed for, but hell dreaded. Holiness is now rather wished for than experience, sin being felt and hated, though before much delighted in. This inward alteration has a strong

influence on the affections, which will also appear in the life and conduct. In short old things are passed away, and all things are become new. Notwithstanding this change, the light will increase under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit; then it will discover more sin still remaining, which causeth godly sorrow: this is commonly called *repentance*, though in reality repentance takes in all the inward changes of the mind, and the reformation of manners; or perhaps more properly, the change in life and conduct is the fruit and evidence of true repentance. Now if I find this inward change, I may humbly conclude that I am regenerated, justified, called effectual, &c.

After all, a doubting believer may object to this purpose: "I believe all the above truths and particulars, yet question often whether mine is the faith of God's elect. The devils and unconverted believe, and I fear *my* faith is no better." True, devils and unconverted persons do believe; but they do not love the truths which they believe. Love and affection to the truth believed, is a better evidence of true grace than strong confidence. A person may be very confident, yet the fruit of his faith very sour. Where the fruit is good, the tree cannot be bad. I conclude on the whole, that love, hope, repentance, patience, humility, resignation, obedience, &c. are certain effects and evidences of true faith; and that it is better to judge of our state by those, than by faith. Yet by all means let it be noted, that I reckon no faith to be true, but that which depends upon Christ and the free promise, and lays the creature low and wounded in the dust. This faith, and this alone, will work by love, and will affect the heart so that the command of God will be embraced. It was this faith that determined Moses to choose affliction and reproach with the people of God rather than the enjoyment of sin. This faith made the primitive Christians to glory in tribulation.

Some ingenious writers choose to look upon faith as the root and principle; and upon hope, love, &c. but only as hope diversified, or taking different roads, or actuating the several natural affections according to the good pleasure of the Holy Spirit, and the different circumstances of the soul. I do not blame these thoughts, but perhaps they are too abstracted and metaphysical for common readers, who yet may be savoury good Christians. He that would enjoy the comfort and satisfaction that is to be found in believing, let him think much of an unseen Jesus. Let him pray for the gracious teaching

of the Holy Spirit. All men are fallible; imperfections abound here. Yet the Lord is pleased often to favour his people with evidences of their interest in Christ.

QUEST. XXVIII.

What is the real difference between true Faith and mere Presumption?

THE query implies, that *faith* and *presumption* resemble each other in some things; though in other things they widely differ. On both these accounts we are apt to run into mistakes. Therefore, in order to distinguish in this important point, I would attempt, first, to show wherein there seems to be some resemblance, viz.

Faith renders a person bold, courageous, and resolute. This we see very evident in Stephen, the Apostles, the whole multitude of martyrs and confessors, and all believers, more or less to this day: for what is a Christian, without some courage? How can he else encounter with so many enemies, and face so many oppositions in the way to glory? A disciple of Christ must be of an heroic disposition.—So presumption renders a person bold and headstrong. This is awfully evident in Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their company. Notwithstanding they were warned so seriously and solemnly by Moses, yet they took their censors, and presumed to stand with boldness before the Lord. They heard all that Moses said; yet they did not seem in the least to be affected, till the earth opened and swallowed them all up. It is to be feared, this is the case with many to this day, till they sink down to the horrible pit.

Faith yields the believer a considerable degree of contentment and satisfaction. By faith Paul was brought to be content in all conditions; and in the same way many others were enabled to be content with their allotment here.—Presumption also gives much satisfaction for the present; as it induces the man to be a lover of sinful pleasure, more than he is a lover of God, of Jesus Christ, &c.

Faith excites one to despise all oppositions, and gives some

degree of strength against all obstacles. Herein the believer follows Christ, who despised the shame, and endured all the contradictions of sinners. *None of those things move me*, saith the Apostle. Presumption resembles faith in this, for it fills a person with pride, so that he despiseth all in his way. There were many of this sort in the days of the Apostles, who were presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of dignities, but fierce, and despisers of those that were good. This is generally the case with a presumptuous person.

Faith renders one active and enterprising. It worketh by love; so that the believer is neither barren nor unfruitful in his belief and knowledge.—Presumption likewise renders one daringly bold and enterprising. The presumption of those in Acts xix. 13, 14. was amazing. They attempted to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, though they were under the dominion of sin and satan themselves.

Faith enables and encourages one to expect very great things indeed; for it is the evidence of things hoped for.—Presumption here also is the ape of faith; so that the person says, *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart*. The presumptuous generally expect great success here, and heaven hereafter.

Many particulars more might be added this way; but to avoid tediousness, I proceed to consider wherein they evidently disagree.

They differ in their author and origin. Faith is the gift of God, comes from above, and is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. But presumption is the brat of Satan, begotten on a corrupt heart, let the appearance in the world be what it will.

They differ in their nature and definition. Faith is a belief of the word of God universally, and consistently, according to the degree of light received, and the evidence felt and observed; the promise, precept, and threatening; but presumption is a partial, an inconsistent and unseasonable belief of the scripture. This will appear if we consider how

They differ in their fruits and effects; which perhaps is the surest way to distinguish them, and so separate precious faith from vile presumption. Let these particulars be weighed.

I. Faith excites one to love and regard the whole scripture, as it is the word of God, though some part of it speaks against the believer's strongest corruption. The good man loves that law which condemns every sin. It is possible that a believer may find sad inclination to covetousness, but he loves the word

that says, *Thou shalt not covet*. The holy commandment shows that sin is exceeding sinful; yet he says, *The law is holy, just, and good, though no good thing dwell in my flesh*. Faith compares one part of the Word with another, and upon this universal and consistent belief, he proceeds so bold and courageous as above noted; this yields him contentment in trouble.—Presumption disposes a person also to love the Word; but the person's love is to those portions of scripture that he imagines to give most liberty to his most beloved and reigning sin. Jehu was resolved to go to the throne through all opposition, and upon every victory and fresh slaughter was ready to shout forth, and say, *This is the word of the Lord!* Presumption drives on unadvisedly, to his own ruin, like Israel who presumed to go up against Amalek. They built upon a former promise, Num. xiv. 40. but they disobeyed the command, which was not to go at that time, v. 41, 42, 43. Presumption makes the promise and the precept generally to clash, but Faith shows how harmoniously they agree, and so defend each other.

II. Faith purifies the heart, mortifies sin; so that if a Christian is confident, he will be humble; if he is holy, he will bewail his remaining corruption; if he despises oppositions, he thinks others much better than himself; if he is enterprising and active, he is on his guard against sin; if he hopes for great things, it is in God's revealed way, and according to his promise. But presumption makes the man more filthy, and adds more strength to his corruption; yet the person will be more heady, highminded, proud, and self-conceited. He seldom bewails his sin from the heart, nor does he choose to think others better than himself: he makes light of sin, if he can but have his own way; he depends more upon his own promises than upon God's. See a full account of persons under the influence of presumption in 2 Pet. ii. from v. 10. to the end of the chapter.

III. By Faith a Believer is enabled to put his whole trust in, and dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the promise of God: yet the same faith excites to all diligence in every part of divine worship, private and public, according to the scripture, and to embrace all the means revealed and appointed for spiritual growth; that the gospel may be adorned, and God glorified. Faith perceives that fervent praying, and circumspect watching, are not only consistent, but must go together. It rests in, and lives upon, Christ, yet teaches the necessity of, and in some measure the way to *deny ungodliness*,

and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. Alas! I fear many specious professors have not faith; they do not seem to know how to live upon Christ, nor to his glory and praise. Presumption pretends to trust much upon Christ, but it is sure to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness one way or other. It makes persons negligent in the discharge of duty. Some seldom or never pray, yet say they believe in Christ, though they neglect gospel ordinances; they do not care whether they read or hear much about real and practical religion. Many talk much of promises, yet are evidently under the dominion of sin.

IV. Faith makes a person more quicksighted; the understanding being enlightened, and the Holy Spirit being the teacher: yet the man that lives by faith, will observe the word of exhortation, will receive reproof and instruction: his conscience being tender, he will be convinced of his error and mistake, then will reform. *Reprove him, and he will be wiser.* Faith will bear patiently keen rebukes, Mic. vii. 9; but the presumptuous man is wiser in his own conceit than others. It is, generally, impossible to convince him of error, he is so blind, so bigotted, and so resolute; he cares not who is offended, stumbled, hardened, or grieved.

V. Faith renders the Saint sensible of his own infirmities, so that he is humble in himself on the account of his manifold weaknesses; he feelingly bewails them before God and men; yet still he is resolved to trust in the Lord, and endeavour to keep on in his way, through all inward and outward discouragements. Presumption so hardens, that a person gradually becomes like one past all feeling; and, in this woful state, he will neither lament his case, nor be humbled before God or man, but will proceed to his own ruin.

In many other particulars, Faith and Presumption differ; yet, in others, they seem to be so near akin, that we should be earnest in prayer for a discerning spirit, and very careful to try ourselves by the Word of God, that we may clearly and comfortably distinguish the great difference. As a good tree brings forth good fruit, so faith, being from heaven, produces heavenly fruit. What is said of the wisdom from above, and that which is not from above, in Jam. iii. 13, &c. is true, regarding faith and presumption. There be many presumptuous persons who are entirely destitute of, and strangers to, true faith; who are altogether unacquainted with unfeigned repentance, the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit, and the consolation of the children of God: yet perhaps there

is not a godly person in the world who is entirely free from presumption. The weak in faith often fear they have no faith, but all presumption; yet that is their infirmity. We should endeavour to judge more skilfully, and discern more judiciously. If I be convinced of much presumption still remaining, I should lament and bewail it; but not conclude that I am quite destitute of faith, though I find but a small degree. I should rather pray for more faith, then presumption will have less room. If I be strong in faith, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, yet I may be guilty of much presumption. The note in Psalm xix. 12, 13. should be well weighed by every one that desires to enjoy much comfort in his soul here, and glory hereafter.

QUEST. XXIX.

Is it possible for that person to be a true believer, who does entirely neglect closet, or private prayer?

IT is a common maxim, that *God has no stillborn children*. I suppose the design of the maxim is this: that as children, in a natural way, who are not born dead, or dying, generally cry; so as soon as a child of God is born again, or regenerated, he cries; or it may be said of him as of Saul, soon after his regeneration, *Behold, he prayeth!*—Prayer is a child's crying, speaking, and complaining to his Father.—Is it possible for a child to be nursed up with father and mother, and yet never speak to either of them, or ask any thing of them, except it be now and then in company? Surely it cannot be: I believe no instance can be produced. So, as the Spirit of prayer is promised, and given, in some degree, to every child of God; for every one that is godly will pray, Ps. xxxii. 6. I conclude that the person who entirely neglects private prayer, can produce no evidence that he is a child of God; when we have so many exhortations and encouragements to pray, and have so many evidences that it was the common practice of both Old and New Testament saints; and, as I believe no good man will attempt to disprove the point, I think it needless to spend much time to prove it. I suppose those who are no friends

to private prayer, are no great admirers of social prayer, and consequently not much acquainted with that valuable piece of the spiritual armour, *all prayer*.

If it be queried, how often a person should pray in private, I will briefly give my opinion. If a person does not retire somewhere or other to pray, once or twice at least every day, I think he is very barren in his soul: he does not seem to have a good taste for spiritual things, nor is he fond of following the footsteps of the flock of Christ. He does not appear to be very desirous of converse with God, to wrestle in prayer, pleading his own want, and the divine promises through Christ. Those who are willing to excuse themselves will say, that they pray in their heart, and by ejaculations converse with God. I believe good men pray much this way; therefore this way of praying should be continued: but if this were all, where would be the propriety and necessity of that command, *Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door?* Why should our blessed Lord so often retire to a secret place to pray? Not enlarging any further, I answer the query in the negative, believing, certainly, that the person who entirely neglects private prayer, is in the *broad way*.

QUEST. XXX.

Which is the best way to cure lukewarmness and trifling indifference in closet prayer?

TRIFLING indifference in private prayer is very daunting, and it has tempted many to neglect it to a lamentable degree. But surely negligence will by no means mend the matter. The best place for a person to judge of his real state in religion, is generally in secret, when the eye of God chiefly observes. Now when a good man endeavours to consider his frame and circumstances in prayer, yet finds lukewarmness, deadness, and formality prevailing, so that he has little heart to engage in the important work, and has but few words, and those very lifeless; he knows not what to do, nor what course to take. To a person in this uncomfortable situation,

I would humbly propose the following particulars, praying for the divine blessing.

I. Entering into his closet, or any retired place, in the house or out, by night or by day, let him commune with his own heart to this purport: "Now I am retiring, as it were, out of the world; I am going to kneel down before, and in the presence of, the great Jehovah,—in whose awful presence, holy angels veil their faces; a God glorious in holiness, therefore with what reverence and godly fear should I approach this throne! A God full of grace, ready to hear, pity, and pardon, through Jesus Christ; therefore, with what confidence and humble boldness should I address him!" With his pure eye, he beholds the hypocrite, and hates his prayer: but he hears the very groanings of the weak in faith; he knows all his wants, and all his infirmities: he regards the prayer of the destitute, and grants the desire of the helpless: a contrite spirit he will not despise, but will be near to him that trembles at his word. Having weighed these things, we should,

II. Consider the chief springs of lukewarmness in prayer. If love to sinful objects, or even to the perishing things of this world, engages and carries away the whole heart and affections, so that divine promises or threatenings are seldom thought of, the heart very little impressed with a sense of divine love, or fear of wrath, vital religion is neither delighted in, nor relished. Alas, what a deplorable state the poor soul must then be in! What a stranger to true consolation! No wonder private prayer is dead and lifeless. The person should fall down before God, confess his sin, and bewail his case.—If a believer falls gradually into a wretched state of formality in prayer; then let him consider from whence, and how he has fallen; let him pray for repentance, and entreat that he may be revived.—If a lifeless frame proceeds from ignorance and darkness, then we should carefully read and hear the word of God, and give the more earnest heed unto it. The Psalmist was often quickened by the word. We are great losers by an indolent temper and disposition.

III. Be sure to consider from whence life, light, and warmth in prayer are to be expected. The Holy Ghost is the promised Spirit of grace and supplication. He helps the infirmities of poor saints;—he brings to remembrance the fulness and suitableness of Christ;—he explains and applies promises;—he encourages the weak to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;—he enables the person to see what a poor creature he is, what he wants, and what his errand to the

throne of grace; so life, light, and strength are communicated: then private prayer is delighted in, and not easily neglected. I do not think any one can be lively and savoury in his private addresses, but he must either experience the kind and sweet assistance of the Spirit of prayer; or else, feeling his want, he importunately entreats and craves the help and direction he longs for. I am persuaded no man prays aright, but he is excited to look unto the love, person, sufferings, righteousness, and faithfulness of a dear Redeemer; the blessed intercessor, who has much incense to offer up with the weak breathings and imperfect prayers of all the saints. We must have faith in prayer, dealing with Christ, and pleading promises, else we shall be formal.

IV. Predestination is very conducive to liveliness in prayer. We should meditate on our present state,—what our privileges, what our mercies, what our infirmities, temptations, and trials, what the promises and threatenings, what and who our enemies, &c. When the mind runs, wanders, and rambles, from morning to evening, upon the world, with the intoxicating lusts thereof; thinking little, or none at all, of divine providence, the cause and glory of God, growth, or declension in grace, our comfort here, and great salvation hereafter; we must, in such a case, be shamefully trifling and formal in prayer. And if we be not wounded for, and cured of this disease, we shall be apt to leave off prayer entirely in a little time.

V. Religious and experimental conversation will greatly help in private prayer. As iron sharpeneth iron, so a believer the face and heart of his brother. When our conversation is worldly, carnal, and void of religion, it is no wonder if we be quite disconcerted for private converse with God, who heareth not sinners. Our devotion will of course be insipid, sleepy, and loathsome; we may expect and fear that God will say, *I will spew thee and thy prayer out of my mouth*. We are commanded to exhort one another daily.

VI. It might be of great service to consider the loss sustained by lukewarmness in prayer, and the very desirable gain by warm and lively devotion: while we take a brief survey of the gain by the one, it is not very difficult to guess at the loss by the other. When life and light are experienced in the closet, the soul draws nigh to God, his only and rich portion, his exceeding joy and great reward. There is freedom and boldness of access to the throne of grace. The soul is fed with sweet and heavenly consolation; there the love of God

is shed abroad in the heart; the believer is sealed to the day of redemption. Moses was retired when he had his Pisgah view. Jacob was alone when he pleaded and wrestled, obtained strength and prevailed. Hannah's prayer was private, when she was comforted, and her countenance was no more sad. Daniel was in private prayer, when he was favoured with great revelations. In prayer (almost, if not quite private,) Jesus Christ was transfigured. In private prayer, Cornelius was directed to send for Peter to preach the gospel, that the door of salvation might be opened to the Gentiles. Peter also was at private prayer, when he was directed or persuaded to go with the messengers sent by the centurion, nothing doubting. Paul seems to be wrestling with God in secret, when that good word came unto him, *My grace is sufficient for thee*. While the Believer's soul is poured forth in prayer, his faith is strengthened, and he obtains fresh vigour to run his race honourably through the wilderness. In secret, the lively Christian reveals his concerns to his Father, tells him what treatment he meets with in the world; he thanks him most heartily for all that is done for him, for all that he has in hand, and much more in hope, and often says, Thus it pleased thee, O Father! The dead and lifeless in prayer, is a stranger to all, or most of these things, and many more.

VII. Some will be ready to say, "Alas, I am so pestered with vain and impertinent thoughts in private prayer, I am ashamed and afraid to enter into my closet! and when I come out, I am rather loaded with guilt. I am often tempted to give over private prayer on that very account." True, such a frame is much to be lamented. If these thoughts flow naturally from a heart swallowed up and lost in cares and pleasures of this world, then they are very sinful. The particulars already noted may, and ought to be, seriously considered. But our thoughts in prayer may run upon those things our very souls hate, and things we seldom or ever think of at other times, and so cause us much grief. A great part of this may be caused by Satan, and proceed from *the law yet in our members*. This may be, and often is, where much life in prayer is experienced, though more still is longed for. These things should by no means hinder private prayer; but should often remind us of that needful advice, *Watch and pray*.

QUEST. XXXI.

What is the difference betwixt the real Spirit, and the mere gift of Prayer?

THE Spirit of prayer is a very valuable and precious gift; but it is common among divines, and other Christians, to make a distinction between the Spirit and the gift of prayer. That distinction is the sum and substance of the query. Therefore by the gift of prayer is generally understood, "Freedom and fluency, or a flow of words, properly, pertinently, agreeably, and affectionately expressed in prayer." By the Spirit of prayer is meant, "An agreeable temper and disposition of mind towards God in prayer."—The Spirit may be considered either as meaning the Holy Ghost assisting and helping our infirmities, enlightening our mind, bringing promises to our remembrance, suiting our cases, strengthening and emboldening our faith in Christ; and thus, in some measure, dictating the very words of prayer; or else as designing more properly our own spirit engaged in prayer, under the gracious influence of the Spirit of God. Now this spirit of prayer in the believer is the very breathing of the new creature, or new nature, which is no other than a new disposition wrought in the soul. In order to explain the point a little further, we may observe the properties and operations of this spirit, where it is, before prayer, in prayer, and after it.

Before prayer, the spirit will excite the person to think; and while he is thinking, he is enlightened to see what a poor, helpless creature he is, and so pressed to pray for relief, lest he should perish; he is led, while thus meditating, to see the fulness of Christ, and his suitableness. He looks on him whom he has pierced. He considers promises as made by a faithful and almighty God; he thinks how others have been answered; and though he is convinced of his utter unworthiness, yet he is resolved, in a kind of heroic, though humble boldness, to pour out his soul before God. Then

In prayer, this Spirit is neither idle nor inactive; but will excite us to eye God more than man; to look over former meditations afresh, so that we feel our wants, and plead the promises: this Spirit draws out the affections towards God, through Jesus Christ, towards the glorious inheritance above,

and the endless felicity of the people of God ; so that the very soul is poured out afresh, as it were, before God, loving, hoping, and apprehending great things, admiring the glory, goodness, and grace of God, what he has promised to, and provided for a worm so vile as he finds and feels himself to be. Under this very desirable assistance of the Spirit in prayer, there is generally a wonderful freeness and pertinency of expression ; the words proceed with ease, but are very weighty, savoury, and importunate, evidencing the intenseness of the mind, the warmth of the heart, and the simplicity of the soul. But there are times and seasons when a believer may be under the influence of the good Spirit, and yet much straitened in thoughts and words. The person may be under such deep convictions of sin, under darkness and fear, that he knows not what to do ; his ignorance such that he knows not what to say ; yet the Spirit assists him to groan out his complaints before God. Such prayers as these are generally heard, and graciously answered, though we may fear they be hateful before God.

After prayer, this Spirit will excite to watch and make observations, to wait for answers to the petitions made : if the vision tarry, the Spirit says, wait for it. The person will be enabled to wait in the way of duty as he has made his supplication according to the will of God. And while he waits, a desirable agreement and harmony may be observed betwixt his heart and tongue, his word and works, his lip and life, his prayer and practice. If he has had desirable freedom in prayer, he will be on his watch lest a snare and a fall should be at hand, lest pride should rise, and Satan get the advantage, and so he be taken by the fowler, and a sad cloud soon follow the bright gleam. Jonah's gourd was soon up and soon down. After a dark and lifeless opportunity in prayer, the Spirit will set the believer to examine into the cause, to spy out lurking sins, to be more watchful, and continue in prayer, notwithstanding this discouragement. The believer often learns many useful lessons from dry and mortifying seasons. Under the influence of the Spirit, the man will be humble.

Now let us a little consider the gift of prayer as separate from the Spirit. This is no more than a natural capacity proceeding from quick natural parts, strong memory, and fluency of utterance ; and these often much assisted by acquirements ; such as a religious education and advantages, much reading and hearing, extensive acquaintance with men and things. Some of these persons may study beforehand how to place

and pronounce their words, how to express themselves so as to come up to, or exceed others, more than what they want, and should chiefly aim at in prayer. Others who are full of words, give themselves little concern to think beforehand: when they are engaged in prayer, they generally run over the same words and phrases, for the most part, in a lifeless and insipid manner. But that threadbare form of words and set of phrases hardly deserve to be termed *the gift of prayer*. Those who are for cultivating the gift of prayer merely, may also have their thoughts employed before, in, and after prayer, yet they have no eye to the glory of God, the intercession of Christ, the influence of the Holy Ghost, mortifying sin, cleansing and purifying the soul, the increase of faith, and growth in grace; all which are eyed by those assisted by, and endued with, the Spirit of prayer.

From these hints it is easy to observe,—That the Spirit of prayer is a precious gift bestowed, in different degrees, on all the children of God, and on them only;—that every one endued with the Spirit has also some degree of the gift of prayer;—that there may be large gifts in prayer, yet without the inwrought influence of the Spirit;—that the Spirit of prayer is a Spirit of faith and holiness. Though a person may be reckoned a gifted man, yet if his heart and tongue clash, if his works contradict his words, so that his lip and life disagree, his prayer and practice jar, it may be concluded that his prayer is little better than *great swelling words of vanity*.—That those who are endued with the Spirit, may be too negligent about the gift of prayer. We should study to cultivate an agreeable and useful gift. A door of utterance in prayer, is very necessary as well as in preaching. But we should beware lest we quench the Spirit.

FEW FREE THOUGHTS

ON THE

CHARACTER AND HAPPINESS

OF THE

HAPPY MAN.



THE happy man was once miserable, and in all respects like unto others, divested of God's love and image, degenerated and become earthly, sensual, and devilish; without strength, and entirely helpless, having no will or power to return to God or seek happiness in him; but, through most free and rich grace, he was in a time and manner most pleasing to him, (who is rich in mercy, and worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,) convinced by the Divine Spirit of his wretchedness and sinfulness by nature and practice, and feels what an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God; so that now he feared the consequence of his sad prevarication, being a constant expectant, that the taper of life will soon dwindle into oblivion, and he shall then feel the fiery indignation and vindictive wrath of an inexorable God, a consuming fire: but this valley of Achor becomes a door of hope; and as miserable and helpless he becomes the object of divine mercy and succour. He is now drawn by the Father to the Son; seeing the inability of the law, and, by faith wrought in him, apprehending the sufficiency of the anointed Lord Jesus as able, mighty, and willing to save him, even to the uttermost; he is now turned to the strong hold as a prisoner of hope, and fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before him; and offices and sweet

characters of Christ conveyed inexpressible joy and comfort to him, and were as ointment poured forth; he saw him just such a Saviour as he wanted in every respect, and accepted him on gospel terms, as a Prince as well as a Saviour; for wisdom and sanctification, as well as righteousness and redemption; and soon the joyous moment came, when he was enabled to call him *my Lord*, by the Holy Ghost, *my beloved is mine, and I am his*; with a holy, becoming boldness, the soul claims relation to Christ, and with a holy triumph proclaimed it: mine according to the tenor of the gospel covenant, and effectual soul-satisfying application, given to, and bestowed on me, to be all that to me that my soul wanted,—a complete and whole Saviour. His soul doth *now* magnify the Lord, and his spirit rejoiced in God his Saviour; he hath now received beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; his is the blessedness of that man, unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin, being justified by faith; he has peace with God through Jesus Christ his Lord, feeling the soul-enriching union with Christ, knowing that he is in him by the Spirit that he hath given him, there is therefore now no condemnation to him. Because he is a Son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying, *Abba, Father*; God saith to him, *Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Son, all I have is thine*. For being made a child, he is become an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ. He feels that he is passed from death unto life; that though once afar off, he is now made nigh by the blood of Christ; no longer a stranger or foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God. His soul at the discovery of this rich and free grace stands astonished, lost in wonder and admiration, crying, *Why me, Lord!* what am I, or my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto! Oh the depth and unsearchable riches of the wisdom and love of God!—Being born of God, he now bears the image of his Father; born from heaven, he is now travelling thither; delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, he becomes a willing subject of the Prince of Peace; worships God in the Spirit, works out of himself, and rejoices in Christ Jesus, and has no confidence in the flesh. He is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new; his understanding is illuminated, and he is light in the Lord, and walks as a child of light; his will is renewed, for to will is present with him; his affections are changed, for he delights

in the law of God after the inner-man; and with the mind serves the law of God, walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; savouring the things that are of God; sowing to the Spirit, having his fruit unto holiness, walking in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless, educated in the school of obedience unto life, in consequence of his being made a partaker of the divine nature, and renewed in the Spirit of his mind. In short, he is inwardly and outwardly changed: having quitted with the prodigal the drudgery of the citizen of the country, and come to his Father's house; delivered out of Egypt, as Israel, he is led to the holy mountain to receive the law written on the fleshly table of his heart; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made him free from the law of sin and death: his trade is religion or practical godliness, being diligent in the works of God, unto which he is created anew, watching unto prayer, and self-denial, going about doing good, visiting the sick, the fatherless, and the widow, directing (by precept or precedent) all to the knowledge and love of God. He walks in the valley of self-abasement, humiliation, and godly sincerity, in the plain garment of simplicity and lowliness; but has a richer suit to appear in court, called *the best robe, the wedding garment, and white linen, or righteousness of Christ*. I cannot help looking back on what he once was: by nature he was in his blood loathsome, defiled, and unclean; but there is a beauty and perfect comeliness put on him; he is stripped of his filthy garments, and is fair with the beauty he has received out of Christ's wardrobe; he shines in the beams of Christ's righteousness: it is indeed sometimes hid from him, and he has only the humbling sight and sense of his deformity; but is never more fair than when he judges himself to be most deformed: indeed the higher he is, the lower; the richer, the poorer; the fuller, the emptier; the stronger, the weaker; strange paradoxes! union and communion with Christ, in his life, which is said to be hid with Christ in God: his graces and spiritual life are continued as beams by the constant emission of light and heat from the sun: and the stream of his holy joys and comforts is perpetuated by the constant flowing of the fountain. Blot the bright promulger of light and heat out of the firmament, and the bright stars are at once in the blackness of darkness; so take away Christ, or separate the soul from him, and all its graces, life, and comfort, are no more. The happy man says of Christ, all my springs are in thee; from thy merits and Spirit flow my redemption, justification, sanctification, peace, joy in the

Holy Ghost, and blessedness in the world to come. He has a Benjamin's portion, a plentiful inheritance in Christ the mercy of mercies, in whom, as in an inexhaustible fountain, all necessary mercies are treasured, and with whom they shall be conferred. Christ, his Rose of Sharon, never withers; nothing unlovely is found in Christ; he is a sea of sweetness, without one drop of gall; all is wholly and altogether lovely, and his incomparable excellencies are pure and unmixed: new wonders are, and will be eternally rising out of him. He is a deep which no line of any created understanding, angelical or human, can fathom. The happy man, who possesses him, and has propriety in him, may well say with Esau, *I have enough*. A happiness indeed commensurate to the unlimited capacities, and suitable to the exigencies and desires of his large high-born soul. And in order to hold fast that whereunto he hath attained, and increase with all the increase of God, he walks close with God, panting after growing communion with, and conformity to him; and in every duty, use of ordinances, and acts of lively obedience to God in Christ, he hath special irradiations of divine life, light, and love; and the more constant his acting is toward Christ, the more continued is his actual enjoyment of special communion with Christ; he finds that obedience is the very place where manifestive love delights to display its glories, and, "by keeping Christ's commandments, he abides in his love." It is his constant prayer, (not satisfied with favour, though full with the blessing of the Lord,) O all ye sovereign winds of the Spirit of God, breathe upon the garden of my soul, that the sweet odours of these thy plants may both be increased, and may also be dispersed afar, and carried into the nostrils of my well-beloved; that while the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard may send forth a sweet smell.

If he is rich, (though it is very rare that riches and *this* happiness are together,) he is faithful in the mammon of unrighteousness, not trusting to such uncertainties, trading with his Lord's talent, as a steward that must give a good account, laying up in store for himself a good foundation against the time to come: If he is poor (perhaps like Lazarus) as to temporals, yet he has a large freehold estate in christian contentment; so that having nothing, he possesses all things: he knows how to be abased, and how to abound; and glories that he, through perfect weakness, can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth him: he is wafted by Hermon's spicy

gales, and enjoys the sweet, balmy air, with Arabia's perfumes, expands aloft, and drinks the floating joys ever springing, finding within himself a well of water springing up into everlasting life, issuing and flowing from the throne, and from thence watering the city of God; he is filled with joy and peace in believing, and abounds in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost; partaking of those joys, that a stranger to God intermeddles not with; and bids them all taste, that they may see how gracious his Lord is, saying, Come, and welcome, to the vital feast, and feel and know with me, that God is yours. He simply believes God, (because he hath said it,) and considers what he says, in order to speak after him, hope and expect from him, and obey perfectly.

He lives much at home, though in the exercise of his god-like graces he most affectionately helps, assists, and forwards others in the way to heaven; knowing that he who hath God at home, i. e. in his own soul, hath all riches, all perfections. As he loves God, in consequence of *his love first to him*, so he loves his children, who with himself are begotten of God also: the law of love is preserved inviolable in his heart, and ever appears legible in his life; and he knows he has passed from death unto life, because he loves the brethren; he is drawn to love most, where God does: God's jewels and peculiar treasure are his, having all his delight with David, in the saints, and excellent in the earth. As he is born of incorruptible seed, so he is sustained by spiritual food, and has meat to eat which the world knows nothing of; his drink is the sincere milk of the word, and wine of the kingdom. He sleeps in the lofty chamber of divine tranquillity, on a green bed of perfect love; his pillow is made of promises, and round about and underneath him are the everlasting arms: he breakfasts every morning on spiritual prayer, and sups every night on the same, having access by faith into that grace wherein he stands, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. He was a paradox to himself, but now he sees how it is. As to the world, they know him not; his happiness lay not exposed to common observation: as a saint, he is one of God's hidden ones,—a jewel among the rubbish, a pearl among pebbles, and precious among the vile: he has put on the robe of salvation, the beautiful garment of gladness; Jesus is his beauteous dress; he is clothed with the sun, and the moon is under his feet, where it should be; he feels and knows, by happy experience, that he has in heaven an enduring substance, and where his treasure is, there is his heart also, so that

Unchain'd, and disengaged from earthly dross,
He treads the thorny footsteps of the Saviour's cross.

His citizenship and conversation is in heaven; he is entitled to all the privileges and immunities of the kingdom of grace and glory: grace rises gradually in his soul as the sun in the heavens, shining more and more unto the perfect day: he is always ready to give an answer of the reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear; yet it is his glory, like the primitive Christians, not to speak, but love great things. Death is not terrible, neither does he dread judgment; he is both habitually and actually ready, waiting till preferred from cross to crown, warfare to rest, and is taken into the joy of his Lord.

With him number'd may I be,
In time and to eternity.

The Character of an Honest Man.

HE looks not what he might do, but what he should. Justice is his first guide; the second law of his actions, is expedience. He had rather complain, than offend; and hates sin more for the iniquity of it, than the danger: his simple uprightness works in him that confidence which oftentimes wrongs him, and gives advantage to the subtile, when he rather pities their faithlessness, than repents of his credulity. He hath but one heart, and that lies open to sight; and were it not for discretion, he never thinks aught whereof he would avoid a witness: his word is his parchment, and his yea his oath, which he will not violate for fear or for loss. The mis-haps of following events may cause him to blame his providence, but can never cause him to eat his promise; neither saith he, *This I saw not*, but *This I said*. When he is made his friend's executor, he defrayeth debts, payeth legacies, and scorneth to gain by orphans, or to ransack graves; and therefore will be true to a dead friend, because he sees him not. All his dealings are square and above the board; he discovers the fault of what he sells, and restores the overseen gain of a false reckoning. He esteems a bribe venomous, though it comes gilded over with the colour of gratuity: his cheeks

are never stained with the blushes of recantation ; neither does his tongue falter to make good a lie, with the secret glosses of double, or reserved senses : and when his name is traduced, his innocency bears him out with courage ; then, lo, he goes on the plain way of truth, and will either triumph in his integrity, or suffer with it. His conscience overrules his providence, so as in all things, good or ill, he respects the nature of the actions, not the sequel : if he sees what he must do, let God see what will follow. He never loadeth himself with burdens above his strength, beyond his will ; and once bound, what he can, he will do ; neither doth he will, but what he can do. His ear is the sanctuary of his absent friend's name, of his present friend's secret ; neither of them can mis-carry in his trust. He remembers the wrongs of his youth, and repays them with that usury which he himself would not take. He would rather want, than borrow ; and beg, than not to pay. His fair conditions are without dissembling ; and he loves actions above words. Finally, he hates falsehood worse than death ; he is a faithful client of truth ; no man's enemy ; and it is a question, whether more another man's friend or his own ; and if there were no heaven, yet would he be virtuous.

The Character of the Faithful Man.

HIS eyes have no other objects but absent and invisible : which they see so clearly, as that to them sense is blind ; that which is present they see not : if I may not rather say, that which is past or future, is present to them. Herein he exceeds all others, that to him nothing is impossible, nothing difficult, whether to bear or undertake. He walks every day with his Maker, and talks with him familiarly, and lives ever in heaven, and sees all earthly things beneath him. When he goes in to converse with God, he wears not his own clothes ; but takes them still out of the rich wardrobe of his Redeemer, and then dare boldly press in and challenge a blessing. The celestial spirits do not scorn his company, yea, his service. He deals in these worldly affairs as a stranger, and hath his heart ever at home : without a written warrant, he dare do nothing ; and with it, any thing. His war is perpetual, without truce, without intermission, and his victory certain ; he meets with the infernal powers, and tramples them under feet. The shield that he ever bears before him, can neither be missed nor pierced ; if his hand be wounded, yet his heart is safe : he is often tripped, seldom foiled, never vanquished. He hath white hands ; and a clean soul fit to lodge God in ; all the rooms whereof are set apart for his holiness : iniquity hath oft called at the door, and craved entertainment, but with a repulse ; or if sin of force will be his tenant, his lord it cannot. His faults are few ; and those he hath, God will not see. He is allied so high, that he dare call God, Father ; his Saviour, Brother ; Heaven, his Patrimony ; and thinks it no presumption to trust to the attendance of angels. His understanding is enlightened with the beams of divine truth : God hath acquainted him with his will ; and what he knows, he dare confess : there is no more love in his heart than liberty in his tongue. If torments, if death, stand betwixt him and Christ, he contemns them ; and if his own parents lie in his way to God, his holy carefulness makes them his footsteps. His experiments have drawn forth rules of confidence, which he dares oppose against all the fears of distrust ; wherein he thinks it safe to charge God with what he hath done, with what he hath promised. Examples are his proofs, and instances his demonstrations. What hath God given, which he cannot give ? What have others suffered,

which he may not be enabled to endure? Is he threatened banishment? there he sees the dear Evangelist in Patmos: Cutting in pieces? he sees Isaiah under the saw: Drowning? he sees Jonah diving in the living gulf: Burning? he sees the three children in the hot walk of the furnace: Devouring? he sees Daniel in the sealed den, amidst his terrible companions: Stoning? he sees the first martyr under his heap of many gravestones: Beheading? lo there the Baptist's neck bleeding in Herodias' platter. He emulates their pain, their strength, their glory. He wearies not himself with cares; for he knows he lives not of his own cost; nor idly omitting means, but not using them without diffidence. In the midst of ill rumours and amazements, his countenance changeth not; for he knows both whom he hath trusted, and whither death can lead him. He is not so sure he shall die, as that he shall be restored; and outfaceth his death, with his resurrection. Finally, he is rich in works, busy in obedience, cheerful and unmoved in expectation, better with evils, in common opinion miserable, but in true judgment more than a man.

THE END.

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